

DEVELOPING A MODEL TO EMPOWER AND ENABLE
CLERGY PERSONS TO FULFILL THEIR CALLING
TO ORDAINED MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

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Turner Chapel AME Church in Marietta, Georgia is the context. The purpose of this study is to discover how to empower clergy persons struggling to fulfill their divine calling. The hypothesis is if clergy persons understand divine, ministerial, and institutional identity then they can become empowered to fulfill their divine call. The project's objective was to design a teaching model including classes, pre and post questionnaires, conduct one-on-one interviews and a focus group using the qualitative method. The results indicated that the field experience empowered the participants to fulfill their calling despite their struggles.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project has unfolded as a labor of love. It has taken a team of dedicated persons with a shared vision who believed in its value and purpose in order to bring this endeavor to fruition. To Dr. Kenneth E. Marcus, my partner in marriage and ministry who served as one of the faculty mentors for this project, much love and appreciation is extended to him for his unfailing love, support, and encouragement. Bertha O'Bryant Young Fordham, of whom, this document has been dedicated is a jewel and the epitome of what it means to be a mother. She deserves a tremendous amount of gratitude for her prayers and vision as it relates to the possibilities that God has in store for her daughter's ministry. Adrienne Fordham-Campbell and Tiara Fordham-Campbell, sister and niece, respectively, spoke words of affirmation and visions of faith that this mammoth project could be done.

Dr. Keith D. D. Lawrence embodies the essence of what it means to be a mentor. There was no doubt that he was undergirding this effort with prayer, process, and practical wisdom so that the requirements of the seminary would be met. His unfailing support is greatly appreciated. The senior mentor, Bishop Donnell Moore deserves heartfelt thanks. He offered coaching throughout this process as well as astute editorial attention to the document. Many thanks are extended to Dr. Angela Washington in that she shared her practical experiences in ministry and critical review of this document.

The generosity of Dr. Felicia LaBoy, the faculty consultant, is appreciated. She possesses a wealth of knowledge and readily shared resources or avenues by which resources could be secured so that the work would be supported by sound academic research; her critical review is most appreciated. To Dr. Diane Plummer, a social psychologist, and Dr. David Rhone, Presiding Elder of the North Atlanta District, much gratitude is extended for serving as professional associates. Dr. Plummer willingly spent time in discussions that facilitated the framework for the field experience. Dr. Rhone willingly shared a wealth of information as it relates to transformational leadership in the context of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Evans Yancy, the peer associate, has the ability to plan ahead and stay on target. He generously shared his plans, talked about the possibilities for a successful project, and helped to keep this process on track. Gratitude goes out to Evans Yancy for his unselfish support and encouragement. In addition, Bonita Martin, the coordinator for the context associates, who functioned as research assistants, deserves many thanks. She labored diligently over copious notes in order to retrieve data results. Much appreciation to Dr. Natalie Jackson, Peggy Evans, Gail Hampton, Terra White, and Felicia Lyles for dedicated work on the research team. Terra White, executive assistant for the Pastor and Co-Pastor of Turner Chapel, has facilitated administrative details and compiled the document.

For the past years the focus group at United Theological Seminary has convened to attend intensive and focus group sessions. Their ability to share vividly as it pertains to academic and ministerial matters was meaningful and insightful. The persons in the group listened well and empathized with one another. The mentors not only set the stage

for academic inquiry but also an atmosphere of worship. Thank you to each peer and most especially to three of our recent graduates, Dr. Connie Carter, whose administrative attention to detail helped to keep the group on track and Dr. Cheryl Nelms-Lawrence and Dr. Constance Belin Wicker who both generously have shared information and materials that helped to facilitate the completion of this document.

Thank you to the focus group from Turner Chapel that participated in this field experience. They willingly shared their stories and their perspective openly and honestly. With their assistance a wealth of data was gathered for this project. To the pastor, Dr. Kenneth Marcus, the executive pastor, Dr. Tar-u-way Bright, the ministers, officers, members, and friends of Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marietta, GA, thank you for making this labor of love possible. Thank you for your continuous prayers.

To President Wendy Deichman, to Dr. Harold Hudson, to Janice Kronour, to Suggar Getter and the faculty and staff of United Theological Seminary, thank you for your support and for embracing the phenomenon of mentoring as a part of the academic pursuit. To God be the Glory!

DEDICATION

This labor of love is dedicated to mother who is loved dearly not only by her daughters but, also, by her church family, Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marietta, Georgia. Bertha O'Bryant Young Fordham is a quintessential Christian mother, a confidante, a friend, and one of her daughter's greatest cheerleaders.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, a tremendous amount of growth has occurred at Turner Chapel AME Church in Marietta, Georgia, the context for this research project. A corresponding growth has surged in the number of persons acknowledging a call to ordained ministry. Oftentimes, these clergypersons struggle with insecurities, anxieties, and questions as it relates to fulfilling their calling as ordained ministers.

Clergypersons demonstrate evidence of the struggle as they attempt to fulfill their divine call in this context. For example, the call to ordained ministry is often viewed as a mysterious, awesome, daunting assignment; therefore, clergy tend to feel enormously inadequate. Episcopal leaders sometimes question the relevancy of the call to specialized ministries and question the benefit of ordaining persons called to a teaching, youth, music, or pastoral care and counseling ministry. A disconnect can happen between what the institutional church calls the clergyperson to do and what the person discerns he or she is called to do. Clergypersons, also, have difficulty completing the educational requirements for the elder and deacon orders because of the financial strain on their personal budgets, the lack of financial assistance from the denomination, and the escalating cost of higher education. In addition, family members, friends, spouses, members of the context and other significant relationships seem to question the authenticity of the clergy's divine call. Some question the authenticity based on gender; therefore, limiting a woman's ministerial arena. Lastly, clergy have the added burden of

working a secular job in order to provide economically for the family while struggling to fulfill their ministerial vocation. (Here vocation, call, and calling have the same meaning.)

The challenge of this research project was to discover how to empower, that is how to enable clergy to carry out their divine calling despite the struggle. The ministry model is designed with this end in mind: to empower and enable clergypersons to fulfill their calling to ordained ministry. Interestingly, research seems to indicate a correlation between calling and identity. Hence, the ministry model proposes to discover if clergypersons understand divine, ministerial, and institutional identity then they can become empowered and enabled to fulfill their divine call. In other words, if they understand who God is, who they are in light of their call to ordained ministry, and if they have a working knowledge of the institutional church then they can be enabled to carry out their divine call despite the vicissitudes of life and the inevitable struggle with insecurities, anxieties, and questions that accompany the journey.

Herein is an effort to develop a ministry model that will help to empower and enable clergypersons to fulfill their divine calling at Turner Chapel despite the struggles encountered. Hopefully, the model can be used to empower clergypersons serving in other faith communities and institutions as well.

In chapter one, Ministry Focus, an exploration of the intersection between my spiritual journey and calling, and ministry in the context is portrayed. Interestingly, the ministers, yours truly included, openly and honestly articulated their struggles. This shared struggle confirmed the need for the empowerment of clergypersons.

In chapter two, the biblical foundations on which the project is grounded is explored and fully discussed and expounded. Chapters three and four establish and reflect on the historical and theological foundations on which the project is grounded. In these chapters, the lessons of history and theology are applied to underscore divine calling as ordained by God.

In chapter five, a thorough exploration of the literature that undergirds this project was undertaken. Under the nomenclature, theoretical foundations, some of the theories, models, and applications for equipping and/or training clergypersons to embrace their God given calling and assume their rightful roles were emphasized.

Chapter six of this document provides a format of the project and defines a structure for the research methodology. This chapter documents and shares how the context associates arrived at the applicable research methodology that was utilized to facilitate the project at Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. It also discusses the field experience and documents the activities that informed that study. It describes in detail the steps that were taken during the field experience to ensure reliable results were attained.

This chapter further investigates and presents the results of the ministry project. It includes the data collection methods and analyzes the data to arrive at specific core issues that should be addressed in soliciting the active participation of the majority in the church. Finally, it presents reflections, summation, and conclusion. Discussions on what could have been executed differently are outlined.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Growing up in a Christian home with a devoted Christian mother and a praying grandmother, who both faithfully gathered with other believers every Sunday morning to worship God, impressed upon me the importance of serving and worshiping God in a church setting. Whereas today, believers can stream a worship service on line or watch a worship service on television, in early formative years and throughout life, we were taught that believers regularly attended church in order to worship God and to fellowship with other member's of the body of Christ. Furthermore, participating in the Young People's Division (an organization whose purpose is to develop young missionary leaders), singing in the choir, being involved in Sunday School, going on mission trips—these early exposures to the church community and its mission and ministry stood to enhance my spiritual formation and help to shape me as a human being. The community of faith, most particularly the church, remains an integral part of life and is like home in some familial way; therefore, the selection of the local church, Turner Chapel AME Church, as the context of this doctoral project is not surprising.

What is surprising is how the providential hand of God has unfolded this life in a way that intersects with this context. Unbeknownst, there were points of synergy preparing for the ministry that God had orchestrated for me to undertake in this particular

context. Illustrations of these points of intersection, as well as, the purpose of this doctoral project are presented in this chapter.

Initial points of intersection occurred during my teenage years, my tenure at Morris Brown College, and during a revival service at Turner Chapel AME Church. During the summer before entering the twelfth grade, the New Jersey Conference Young Peoples Division of the AME Church selected me as one of the delegates to travel on a mission trip to Trinidad and Georgetown, Guyana. The fact that these countries had a majority black population, and the fact that their prime ministers were of African descent had made a significant impression. Coincidentally, while a student at Morris Brown College, I met a young man in Bible study who hailed from one of the countries previously visited. He was born on the island of Trinidad in a small town called Longdenville. He was very intelligent, talented, committed to God and was a member of the AME Church. He had also attended the missionary conference, although, we had not met during that time. We started dating while students at Morris Brown College and later married in 1980, becoming partners in life and ministry. We worked, as partners in ministry at St. Luke and Nimno A.M.E. Churches in Athens, Georgia and at Greater Smith Chapel AME Church in Atlanta, Georgia. One evening while worshiping at this particular context, Turner Chapel AME Church, where he served as the guest revivalist, God called me to preach and to seek ordination as an elder in the AME Church. In 1988 the bishop appointed this same young man to shepherd this context as the senior pastor, and a few years later the church hired me as the assistant pastor, currently the co-pastor. We have served this congregation for twenty-five years.

Furthermore, while a teenager, participating in the New Jersey Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a person addressed the Bishop of the conference stating that he taught preachers. Deep within my spirit dwelt the sense that God wanted me to do the same thing, that is, to teach preachers. This calling which now seems seminal, that is, one having possibilities for future development, directed the early course of my life and ignited a passion for the teaching ministry of the church. This passion inspired me to specialize in Christian Education even though at the time opportunities for a career in this field seemed scarce in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Most unexpectedly, through the influence of my spouse, his mentor, the bishop, hired me as the first full-time Director of Christian Education for the AME Church in Georgia. Serving the AME Church in this capacity helped me learn how the teaching ministry of the church operates on the different hierarchal levels, that is, the local, district, conference, episcopal, and general level. From this view, the passion for working in the local church was discovered.

When Turner Chapel AME Church and the senior pastor, Kenneth Edward Marcus, had positioned the church to hire a Christian education director, the vice-chairman of the trustee board spoke to the senior pastor and suggested that the church hire me since my specialty was in this area. Pastor Marcus recognized how my academic preparation and experience in the Christian education field could help develop the ministry of the church; so, they hired me as the first full-time assistant pastor.

In retrospect, the rapidly growing church, having gained 120 members the first year of Pastor Marcus' tenure, having approximately 6,000 members to date, needed someone to develop foundational ministries to sustain its growth. That responsibility was

assigned to the assistant pastor. Throughout my tenure as the assistant pastor, the opportunity to develop and design ministries, to empower and equip leaders has fallen in my garden. The New Member's ministry was one of the first ministries developed and coordinated in order to orient the new members concerning the life and the culture of the church as well as to affirm their faith. The ministry comprised a series of pertinent classes relating to Turner Chapel and the general AME Church. The new members had to complete this course in order to be received into full membership. These classes included the doctrine of salvation, the history and structure of both the General AME Church and the local church. The participants received information concerning the various boards, organizations, and ministries of Turner Chapel. Board and ministry leaders would join these newest members to participate in a fellowship hour, and at that time they would share ministry information and present opportunities whereby these newest members could render service to the church and the community.

In addition to the new member's ministry, the assistant pastor redesigned the Bible study. Beforehand the attendees would convene in the sanctuary in order to take part in a corporate study. When the leadership recognized that this generation of people prefers a chance to choose their Bible study classes, we presented a theologically relevant, age appropriate course of study, and encouraged the members to register for a class of their choosing. We renamed the Bible study, the Church-at-Study, and offered a fellowship dinner prior to the study hour as an added incentive. This new design tripled the attendance.

Furthermore direction was given to restructuring the vacation Bible school curriculum, so that the ministry would fit the needs of the congregation. Since persons

could not come to vacation Bible school during the daytime, we designed the vacation Bible school so that age appropriate classes would occur during the evening and also instituted music and art classes in the curriculum.

Succinctly, during my tenure at this context, developing the premarital sessions, casting the vision for the counseling ministry and the women's ministry, as well as developing the self-discovery ministry have been a part of this job description. A word about the women's ministry: one of the most rewarding occurrences took place when the women grasped the vision that the needs of the women at Turner Chapel ought to be addressed not only during a once a year retreat but, also, throughout the year, and they learn to actualize this vision with a spirit of excellence. Interestingly, while developing and establishing the self-discovering ministry, emerged the personal discovery that all along God had been utilizing my gifts, talents, skills, preparation, experience, and passion to help develop people and ministries at Turner Chapel AME Church. The self discovery or service ministry was based on a concept coined, S.H.A.P.E.,¹ and similarly one referred to as P.L.A.C.E.² Those participating in this course of study would begin to view and understand their identity through a lens that identified their spiritual gifts, highlighted the people and ministries where they loved to serve, underscored their abilities, determined their personality profile, and valued their life experience. With this view in mind, the participant would then prayerfully, with the assistance of a coach, attempt to discover or confirm how God had uniquely created them and would come to realize how

¹ Eric Rees, *S.H.A.P.E.: Finding and Fulfilling Your Unique Purpose for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2006).

² Jay McSwain, *PLACE: Finding Your Place in Ministry* (Alpharetta, GA: PLACE Ministries, 2000).

this outlook could inform and direct their choice of ministry. In retrospect, this course of study as well as both personal and ministerial experience in this context and the broader community nurtured the aforementioned seminal call to teach preachers, and it has evolved and become a call to help facilitate the growth and development of God's people, to help people discover their God ordained purpose, and to accompany them on their journey to personal and spiritual growth and development. Teaching, preaching, coaching, offering care and guidance are means by which this calling may be executed.

During the past twenty-five years the population of this context has grown phenomenally—from 150 members to 6,000. There are a little over 100 boards, organizations, and ministries. Needless to say, effective leadership is necessary to maintain a healthy church. Regarding this, the strategic planning committee concluded that the processes for placing, training, and evaluating leaders within this context were ineffective. Leaders have become frustrated and apathetic.³ As a result of these findings Turner Chapel instituted a leadership commission to begin addressing these concerns. To date the leadership commission has developed a program that may benefit some of the developmental needs of the fifty ministers and licentiates, who are ordained and in different phases of the ordination process, but a course designed specifically for them may help them to minister and lead more effectively. An objective of this doctoral project was to develop a teaching model at Turner Chapel AME Church that might assist in the development of the leadership capacity and skills of ministers and licentiates.

The idea of developing the leadership capacity and skills of ministers and licentiates seemed broad, so the road to accomplishing this purpose had to be

³ Report of Turner Chapel AME Church: Strategic Planning Meeting, October 20, 2011.

streamlined. Recognizing the synergy between a problem that I possess and a problem that other ministers in the context have, brought clarity as it relates to what problem could be investigated. The shared problem is that clergypersons have struggles, anxieties, and questions pertaining to fulfill their call to ordained ministry. How to empower and enable the clergy to fulfill their calling despite these challenges became the purpose of the model.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Old Testament

Introduction

The impetus for the exploration of the passage, Exodus 3:1-15,¹ has to do with a personal struggle with accepting the call to ordained ministry and a struggle with ministerial identity. Perhaps in dealing with Moses' commission, some lessons could be learned and some insights garnered. Interestingly, from an examination of the selected passages, some scholars seem to make a distinction between a call and a commission. For example, the notion that Moses was summoned to carry out a task, not fulfill the calling of an office. Furthermore, the focal point of his commission seemingly was to encounter Yahweh so that Moses would come to know who the Deity is and understand that Yahweh is present to liberate the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians. Therefore, the purpose of the Old Testament portion of this biblical foundation is to explore the notion that Exodus 3:1-15 functions to reveal the presence and identity of the Deity to Moses, to evince how the commission of Moses serves the same purpose, and to discuss the self-revelation of the Deity.

¹Exodus 3:1-15, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

Literary Content

The book of Exodus is one of five books of the Pentateuch. Within the compilation of books in the Old Testament, it functions to connect the age when the Israelites flourished under the influence of Joseph who knew God and had a favorable relationship with Pharaoh. When moving from Genesis to Exodus, it seems apparent that the promise of God to greatly increase the progeny has come to fruition, but the Israelites as yet have not reached the Promised Land. Also, they do not know God, and their overwhelming numbers now threaten the Pharaoh of Exodus.

Thomas B. Dozeman has presented a thematic approach to interpreting Exodus that denotes two parts: The Power of Yahweh in Egypt (1:1-15:21) and The Presence of Yahweh In the Wilderness (15:22-40:38). Under part one is the subtheme “Commission of Moses in the Wilderness,” (3:1-4:18) which is organized around the motif of divine commission. Dozeman separates the unit into two parts: 3:1-15 and 3:16-4:18. The passage investigated for this chapter, 3:1-15, is the first of three additional commissions. The other two are in the second unit (3:16 and 4:12). Dozeman elucidates how these two sections are interwoven by the objections of Moses to accept the divine commission. This literary approach coheres 3:1-4:18 into a literary unit in the Non-P History (A discussion of this source and others will be presented under the topic historical background).² Seemly, a theme explored in 3:1-15 is divine identity.

² Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary On Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

N. Habel categorizes the unit as a call narrative, displaying a formal structure of a prophetic call and ends the unit at verse twelve.³ Robert D. Miller, II concurs with N. Habel that the call narrative evinces the prophetic call. He states, “Most scholars suggest that the call narrative of Moses is classical prophetism. . .”⁴ Miller purports that there are six stages to the narrative, most observable in Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, occasionally, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, and possibly Second Isaiah. An outline of the stages is enumerated below:

- 1) Confrontation with God: Exodus 3:1-4a for Moses; Judges 6:11-12 for Gideon; Jeremiah 1:4, Isaiah 6:1-2, Ezekiel 1:28b? Often introduced by an imperative “know.”
- 2) The Introductory Word of Grounds of Commission: Exodus 3:4b-9; Judges 6:12-14a, Jeremiah 1:5a, 13-16, and 18-19, Isaiah 6:3-7; Ezekiel 2:3.
- 3) The Commission: Exodus 3:10-11a, Judges 6:14b; Jeremiah 1:5, 7, and 9 and Isaiah 6:8-10.
- 4) Objections raised by the prophet: Exodus 3:11-4:1, 10, and 6:12; Judges 6:15-16a; Jeremiah 1:6; Isaiah 1:11a and Ezekiel 2:6-8.
- 5) The Reassurance-assuaging the objections and unfolding the nature of the commission: Exodus 3:6, 12a, 4:12, and 15; Judges 6:16, 22; Jeremiah 1:7-8, 10, and 17-19; and Isaiah 6:5, 11-12.
- 6) Renewal of the Commission and a sign: Exodus 3:12; Judges 6:17; and Jeremiah 1:9-10.

Miller holds that prophetic calls are nearly universal in society and that the call narrative is common in cultures where prophecy exist.⁵

³ Norm Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” ZAW77 (1965): 297 accessed December 10, 2013 fontes.litc.edu/~rkein/Documents/habel.hmt—habel.

⁴ Robert D. Miller, II, “The Form-critical Problem of Moses’ Call” (January 1, 1995):114, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASeries, EBSCO host, accessed October 16, 2013.

⁵ Miller, “The Form-critical Problem of Moses’ Call,” 116.

Dozeman seems to classify the genre as mixed rather than a call narrative. He explains that the hero, Moses is given a specific task to carry out, a commission not a call, since he does not assume a particular office. The commission, 9-12, is framed by the divine self-revelation in 3:1-8 and 13-15. He states, “The mixing of genres in 3:1-15 provides a point of departure for interpretation. The commission of Moses (3:9-12) is at the heart of the episode, but the point of focus is the identity of Yahweh (3:1-8 and 13-15).⁶ This notion of mixed genres is most important for interpreting this passage because it emphasizes not only the commission but also the significance of divine revelation in the passage of scripture.

Historical Background

Most scholars agree that the book of Exodus does not give an account of history in the conventional sense, that is, using the methodology of modern historiography. Rather the author or authors have possibly compiled the book from sources of oral tradition extending over generations. Some classifications for this specific type of historical prospective include salvation history, faith history, and etiologic history. Neither of these classifications aims to record a precise account of chronology, dates, or facts. The purpose of salvation and faith history is to give an account of the salvation and faith of the Israelite people; etiologic history presents a story of their beginnings and answers questions relating to their origin. George V. Pixley explicated the aim this way: “The reason why this account was keep alive was that it stated, for each generation in

⁶ Dozeman, *Commentary On Exodus*, 120.

Israel, who Israel was as a people, who its God was, and how Israel differed from neighboring peoples.”⁷

Apparently, scholars hold a range of views regarding the author or authors of the Exodus. Contemporary interpreters hold that the sources comprising the Documentary Hypothesis, the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), and the Priestly (P), compiled the Pentateuch. The notion that Moses authored Exodus does not hold up under the scrutiny of modern source or historical criticism. Dozeman employs what he refers to as the tentative title “Non-P” to identify the Non-P literature (J and E). He explains that the Non-P History in the Pentateuch includes various literatures from many periods of Israel’s history and that a firm date for the Non-P History is not necessary for interpreting Exodus.⁸ Dozeman’s conclusion that a firm date for the Non-P History is unnecessary for interpretation is significant for the interpretation of Exodus 3:1-12, a Non-P source, since scholars have dated the account purportedly composed by J and E to extend from the monarchial period to the post-exilic period of Israelite history.

Notably, the passage depicts a narrative that tells the story of events set in a particular time. According to Dozeman, the only historical evidence concerning the origin of the Israelite people and their relationship to Egypt is designated on the Merneptah Stele, composed during the fifth year of Merneptah’s rule (ca. 1220 B.C.E.) who followed Ramses II, ruling in 1224-1211.⁹ Even so, the setting does yield itself to an

⁷ George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1988), xvii.

⁸ Dozeman, *Commentary On Exodus*, 86.

⁹ Dozeman, *Commentary On Exodus*, 86.

era, during the expansionist reign of Ramses II, when slave laborers built Pithom and Ramses as supply cities for Pharaoh (Ex 1:11). George V. Pixley paints this picture,

In the period like that of Ramses II, when large construction projects were being undertaken, these groups of foreigners settling in the eastern parts of the kingdom would have been the first to feel the burden of tribute to be paid in the form of labor. It is among these groups that we must look for the proto-Israelites who were the central figures of the events giving rise to the story of the exodus.¹⁰

This being said, the interpreter then could engage the narrative with the imagination and visualize an era of oppression, when Pharaoh considered the prolific progeny of the Israelites a threat, and therefore inflicted harsh oppression upon them. For example, he set taskmasters over them who oppressed them with forced labor (Ex 1:11); he legislated genocide, ordering the death of every newborn Hebrew boy (Ex 1:16); he forced the Hebrews to make bricks without straw (Ex 5:7). The oppression of the Israelites sets the stage for Yahweh to intervene on their behalf and fight against this oppression. Under this backdrop, Yahweh sends Moses to Pharaoh, to bring Yahweh's people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. Assuredly, whether the audience represents those under the oppression of the Babylonian exile or the more contemporary oppression of the American slave system, they can receive hope that God will intervene on their behalf.

An understanding of the wilderness setting, the mountain of God, the burning bush, the angel, the reference to bring out, a land flowing with milk and honey, the sign, and the meaning of the Deity's name, Yahweh, may enhance the interpretation of this passage. The mountain of God is associated with the presence of God and the dwelling place of the Deity. In this context the Deity has come down to deliver the Deity's people from the Egyptian oppression (v. 3:8). More specifically, Dozeman, points out, that

¹⁰ Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective*, 10.

Horeb the mountain of God, is also the mountain of divine appearance to humans.¹¹

Johnstone states that just as other cosmic gods have their mountain so does the Lord.¹²

Secondly, the burning bush that would not be consumed and the angel appearing in the flame signified a supernatural, miraculous, sensational phenomenon. It signified a theophany, a manifestation of the presence of a Deity. Understandably this event attracted Moses' attention. Dozeman explains that the Hebrew translation for bush is similar to the second name for the mountain of divine revelation, Sinai.¹³

Bernard P. Robinson capsulized his view as it relates to the early readers' utilization of the burning bush story to portray Yahweh.

The story of the burning bush served for the early readers of the Pentateuch, . . . to portray Yahweh as an attractive but formidable deity who was in control of the forces of nature and revealed himself definitively on Sinai; a deity who prepared Moses to act as his agent; a deity who—a comforting doctrine this was, for exiles among others—was not confined to specific sacred spaces but made of any place where he intervened a veritable sanctuary.¹⁴

In addition, the angel of the Lord who speaks from the bush comes as a messenger of the Lord, represents the Lord, and acts on the Lord's behalf. On the other hand Johnstone deems that the burning bush symbolized persecution rather than a theophany. Israel represented the bush that would not be consumed, persecuted but not destroyed.¹⁵

¹¹ Tom Dozeman, "Study Notes" in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, General Editor, Walter J. Harrelson, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 90.

¹² William Johnstone, *Exodus Old Testament Guides* (Sheffield, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1990), 48.

¹³ Dozeman, "Study Notes," 90.

¹⁴ Bernard P. Robinson, "Moses at the Burning Bush," *Urban College, Durham DH7 9RH JSOT* 75 (1997):121.

¹⁵ Johnstone, *Exodus Old Testament Guides*, 48.

Jorge Pixley, approached the terminology “to bring them up out” (3:8) from the perspective of liberation criticism and then juxtaposed two motifs in the story of Exodus: a story of liberation and a story of immigration. The goal of the liberation story is freedom from slavery, whereas the goal of the immigration story is the land of Canaan.¹⁶

Furthermore, a land flowing with milk and honey refers to the land that God promised to Abraham in Genesis, the Promise Land. The symbolism lends itself to the imagination. It will be rich in natural resources, a place of abundance whereby the Israelites will receive the blessings of Yahweh. Notwithstanding the imagery of a utopia, the passage establishes a location inhabited by the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Ex 3:8). In the light of Gale Yee’s postcolonial approach to biblical criticism, Yee startles conventional interpretation by pronouncing the promise of Yahweh as a promise to occupy the land of an indigenous people, identifying Yahweh as a magisterial regent sanctioning brutal acts of imperialism.¹⁷

Close Analysis

As a result of a close analysis of the passage, the presence of God is revealed in the motifs of the mountain of God, Horeb, the burning bush, the angel of the Lord and the form of a theophany. To illustrate, Moses was tending his father-in-laws flock beyond the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Unbeknownst to Moses, he had

¹⁶ Jorge Pixley, “Liberation Criticism,” in *Methods for Exodus*, ed., Thomas B. Dozeman, Ph.D. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148.

¹⁷ Gale A. Yee, “Post-colonial Criticism,” in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Ph.D. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 224.

come to the dwelling place of God, Mount Horeb. In the ancient Near East, gods resided in the mountains (v. 1). Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai are references to the same mountain of god. Dozeman clarifies how the bush in Exodus 3:2 signifies the sacred site of Sinai where as the wilderness of Sinai functions as a general region for the revelation of God in the Non-P History. In Exodus 33:6, Mount Horeb also plays a role in Non-P History as the location of the tent of meeting, that is, Yahweh's home.¹⁸

In verse two, an angel of Yahweh appears to Moses in a flame of fire from an incombustible bush, indicative of the presence of God. According to Dozeman, the aim of this encounter between the angel of Yahweh and Moses is to identify God.¹⁹ The phenomenon of a blazing incombustible bush startled Moses. He had no notion that a Deity was present.

The form of a theophany appears to establish the presence of God in the passage. Dozeman's comparison of similarities between Moses' theophany and Jacob's theophany in Genesis 46:1-5 seems to concretize the point.

- 1) The Deity addresses the human protagonist by repeating the name, "Jacob, Jacob" (Gn 46:2) during a dream at night. Similarly God called to Moses out of the burning bush, "Moses, Moses" (Ex 3:4).
- 2) The call prompts the response, "Here I am" (Gn 46:2; Ex 3:4).
- 3) Both of these encounters progress toward a divine self-revelation, in which the Deity is revealed as God of the ancestors (Gn 46:3; Ex 3:6).
- 4) Each passage moves to a proclamation, which reveals that God is present in Egypt, using language of migration and return. Genesis 46:3-4, "He said, 'I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; In Exodus 3:7-8, "Then the Lord

¹⁸ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 124.

¹⁹ Dozeman, "Study Notes," 90.

said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard, their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a land flowing with milk and honey....'

The promise that God made to Jacob, that is, to come down to Egypt and to bring the Israelites up again, provides the background for an interpretation of God's presence in Egypt.²⁰

Once God had gained the attention of Moses, God then reveals that Moses is standing on holy ground, a sacred place where God dwells. At this junction God commences with a progressive self-revelation. God reveals that the Deity is the God of Moses' father. Not only this but, also, the God of Moses ancestors -the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Ex 3:6). Perhaps by revealing the familial connection between the Deity and Moses, this divine self-revelation displays that God is attempting to enter into the life of Moses and his family in a more personal way, and the reference to the ancestors indicates that the relationship has an historical connection that includes the entire people of Israel. This initial divine self-revelation frightened Moses rather than ensuing a connection. Verse six says that out of fear, Moses hid his face from God.

Verse seven and eight continue the divine self-revelation and continue this anthropomorphic dialogue between the Deity and Moses utilizing human imagery in order to help Moses understand the nature of the divine. Yahweh knows the suffering that the Israelites have withstood at the hand of the Egyptians. Not only does Yahweh know but, also, Yahweh has observed their misery and has heard their cry. Most notably Yahweh uses the possessive pronoun, my, to lay claim to the Israelites of whom Yahweh

²⁰ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 121.

knows, has seen, and has observed their oppression. Yahweh is present with the Israelites and moved to act on their behalf in order to liberate them from Egyptian oppression. Exodus 3:8 states, “I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” Yahweh discloses to Moses, the revelation that Yahweh will actively participate in the deliverance of the Deity’s people, the Israelites.

In a comparison of Exodus 3:9 and 3:7, there is obvious repetition. In 3:9, Yahweh impresses upon Moses the fact that Yahweh knows about the suffering of the Israelites and is moved to act on their behalf, and then emphasizes the promise of land made to Jacob in Genesis 46:2. In verse 9, Yahweh repeats the divine awareness of the oppression but in verse 10 Yahweh sent Moses to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and assures Moses that Yahweh will be with him as a co-laborer.

The placement of verse 9 at this point in the passage with this repetitive thought seems to interrupt the flow and perhaps functions to introduce a different focus. Here to fore, the focus was the presence of God (3:1-6) and the self-identification of God (3:6-8). Now the focus shifts and Moses moves from the background to the foreground. The Lord tells Moses in verse 10, “I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites out of Egypt.” The Lord commissions Moses to carry out the liberation of the Lord’s people. Moses’ objection in verse 11, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt,” evinces that he does not know his own identity and is experiencing an identity crisis. Understandably so, since Moses’ life prior to his encounter with the Deity seemly precipitated a struggle with identity. In Exodus chapters

1 and 2, Moses was born a Hebrew yet his mother positioned him to be reared in an Egyptian palace by Pharaoh's daughter in order to protect him from genocide. Moses murdered an Egyptian in order to defend an Israelite, yet he was not accepted as a part of those people. When he fled to Median to escape the consequences of his actions, he became a shepherd in a foreign land. Who was Moses-the son of a Hebrew, the son of Pharaoh's daughter, a murder, a fugitive, or a shepherd?

The focal shift in verse 9 mentioned above seems to be, as Dozeman purports, the introduction to the commission of Moses and, therefore, is a transition from divine revelation to divine commission.²¹ In verse 10, the Lord commissions Moses, and in verse 11 Moses' objects: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Interestingly enough in verse 12 the Lord does not respond to Moses' question but rather assures him of his divine presence. On this mission, the Lord will accompany Moses. Then the Lord gives a sign: "...and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." In most prophetic commission forms, the protagonist requests a sign in order to receive assurance from the deity (For example, Gideon requested a sign). In this instance, the divine initiated the sign without a request from Moses. The meaning of the sign is perplexing. Seemingly, God is assuring Moses that in the future, he and the Israelites will worship on the very same mountain upon which Moses received the commission. Olson concurs; he states, "God promises to bring Moses and the Israelites to the mountain of God after their rescue."²² Other scholars deem that

²¹ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 131.

²² Dennis L. Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed., Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45.

the sign references the burning bush. But as the narrative unfolds in chapter 19, God does liberate Moses and the Israelites and brings them to Mount Sinai, which is also known as Mount Horeb.

Exodus 3:12 ends the commission motif and the divine self-revelation continues to unfold in Exodus 3:13-15 when Moses says to God,

If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am. He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations.

For the contemporary reader and perhaps those privileged to hear and read these verses in ancient times, a name such as this is strange and puzzling. According to Dozeman the threefold repetition, “I will be who I will be,” I will be sent me,” apparently is for emphasis and appears to further the theme of divine presence. The divine name Yahweh is revealed to Moses in 3:15: “And God said further to Moses, ‘Thus you will say to the Israelites, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob sent me to you’ (Dozeman’s translation).²³

Dozeman further deems that the divine name evolves through two stages in the narrative, playing with its verbal character. Firstly, God responds to Moses in verse 14 in the first person, “I will be who I will be.” When read from this point of view the focus in 3:15 is not the theme of God the fathers but rather the verbal character of Yahweh, translated in the third person masculine, he is. To translate in this manner emphasizing the verbal character of the name Yahweh shifts the focus from the being to the actions of

²³ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 134.

God. In addition, he elucidates that the name Yahweh in Exodus 3:15 actually creates an incomplete sentence that poses a question: He is what? Rather than stating a name, which would be in the form of a noun.

Dozeman answers the question posed, by saying, the content of the divine verbal name is contained in the actions of God for Israel. By reading in the, Non-P History the question posed by the name receives an answer: He is savior, healer, revealer, covenant maker, and so on. Dozeman points out that the first insight into the divine name references the past; the God appearing to Moses and the Israelites in Egypt is also the God of the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Use of the third person masculine pronoun stems from Dozeman's literal translation of the text).²⁴

Dennis T. Olson purports that God reveals to Moses God's special name, "I Am Who I Am" in 3:14 and agrees with Dozeman that a better translation of the name from the Hebrew might be, "I Will Be Who I Will Be" (Olson's translation). He further explains that the divine name is built on the Hebrew verb to be and is related to the Hebrew divine name, Yahweh or YHWH, translated the Lord in most English versions. Also, he states that this divine name both reveals and conceals something about who God is, but the fuller meaning of God's mysterious name and character will unfold at certain crucial junctures throughout Exodus (20:2-6; 29:45-46; 33:19; 34:6-7).

Perhaps, it would have been insightful if Olson had explicated his views as it relates to what the name reveals in Exodus 3:14. From a reading of the passages highlighted above concerning the future revelation of God's identity, seemingly, God is Yahweh who liberates the Israelites from slavery, requiring sole allegiance, and adheres

²⁴ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 135.

to generational guilt. In 29:45-46, Yahweh who brought the Israelites out of Egypt will dwell among them and be their God. In 33:19, Yahweh is gracious and compassionate. In 34:6-7, Yahweh is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, loyal in love, faithful, forgiving, punishes the guilty, and the punishment has generational impact.

Pixley presents two possible interpretation of Exodus 14a. He states that it is possible to interpret the verse as evasive: “I am who I am” period, meaning there is no reason to reveal the divine name to anyone. The problem that Pixley has with this interpretation is the notion that it does not fit the context. Moses is not curious concerning the name; he just wants to be able to answer the possible question posed by the Israelites when he reaches Egypt.²⁵

The second possibility, according to Pixley, is to interpret the verse “I am the one who is,” rather than “I am who I am.” In this case God is responding to the unexpressed doubts of Moses. Pixley states, “Moses is to understand that God, the God of the oppressed, is a reality, and this will give him courage to set out on his mission. . . . “God is responding to Moses doubts about who God is and Moses’ problem as to what strategy to utilize to persuade the Israelites that it is the God of their own ancestors who has summoned him to carry out this mission of liberation.”²⁶

²⁵ Pixley, *On Exodus*, 21.

²⁶ Pixley, *On Exodus*, 21.

Conclusion

God's dialogue with Moses functions to reveal the divine presence of the Deity. The burning bush, the angel of God, the mountain of God—Horeb, signify the presence of the Deity. The dialogue also shows Moses that the Deity before him is the God of his father in Egypt and the God of the Israelites. God acknowledges an awareness of the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt and promises to go down and liberate them from their oppression, and bring them out of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey—a type of utopia. This recalls the promise God made to Jacob in Genesis. The scene shifts from God to Moses. Here God commissions Moses to liberate the Israelites and promises to be with them. Moses' initial objection demonstrates that he does not know who he is; for him his identity is ambiguous. God promises to be with him and seals the commission with a sign that the divine initiates. Moses poses a question to God concerning the divine's identity. God reveals God's name, Yahweh, "I will be who I will be." The name is perplexing and God's identity remains mysterious. The identity of God unfolds in later chapters of Exodus where the reader comes to know God by Yahweh's actions on behalf of the Israelites, Yahweh's people.

Exodus 3:1-15 highlights the significance of identity as it relates to fulfilling the divine calling. In this anthropological dialogue between the Deity and Moses the reader discovers who the Deity is. The Deity is the protagonist who initiates and orchestrates the entire scenario. This act of initiation implies that the Deity is sovereign. The Deity who is aware of the pain and the suffering of the people initiates Moses' commission summoning him to deliver the Israelites from the oppression of Pharaoh. Though Moses

does not know the Deity, the Deity is not a stranger to the people of Israel but is identified as God of Moses' ancestors and the ancestors of the Israelites.

Moses on the other hand is ambiguous concerning his identity and God's identity. The Lord commissions Moses in verse ten; "I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites out of Egypt." Moses raises an objection in verse eleven, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Understandably Moses is ambiguous as it relates to his identity since his life prior to his encounter with the Deity seemingly precipitates this identity struggle. Who was Moses—the son of Hebrews, the son of Pharaoh's daughter, a murder, a fugitive, or a median shepherd?

Furthermore, Moses does not know the identity of the divine; therefore, he asks the question what is your name. The response, "I am who I am."¹ "I will be who I will be" is mysterious. The identity of God continues to unfold in later chapters of Exodus through Yahweh's actions on behalf of the Israelites, Yahweh's people.

Clergypersons struggling with insecurities, anxieties, and questions pertaining to fulfilling their divine calling might be empowered by knowing who God is through the lens of Exodus 3:1-15. This passage reveals that God is sovereign, therefore, initiates the call to whomever God chooses. Understandably the identity of God and that of ministerial identity is an ongoing revelation and discovery along the journey to fulfilling the calling. When clergy understand that the calling is daunting and mysterious like standing on holy ground or encountering an incombustible burning bush, then they might realize the inevitability of anxiety. In these instances, God gives the assurance of the divine presence. Both God and the clergy are co-laborers working to fulfill the divine calling. The clergy person can rest assure that God accompanies him or her on the

journey. Lastly, God empathizes with God's people and is aware of their struggles, the struggles of the clergy as well as the laity.

New Testament

Introduction

This section continues the exploration of the call to ministry in the light of Jesus' commission to Peter and Jesus' restoration of Peter contained in John 21:15-19. Its purpose is to show that Jesus is calling Peter to demonstrate his love for him by commissioning Peter to feed Jesus' sheep, to portray how this encounter restored Peter, and to reveal Peter's future. Emphasis is placed on the metaphor, the Good Shepherd, in order to explore and discuss the characteristics of ministerial identity.

Literary Content

Interestingly, just as the book of Exodus functioned to reveal the identity of God, so does the Gospel of John. As one of the four Gospels, it functions to reveal who God is through the life and works of Jesus. As Jesus carried out his ministry, performed signs and miracles, and engaged his disciples in discourse, he was revealing his identity. When the writer of John opens the Gospel with these words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with, God and the Word was God," the writer is casting a portrait of Jesus as the incarnate Word of God. Gail O'Day says it best in this way, "The eternal word (Gr. *logos*) completely enters the human and time-bound sphere by becoming flesh

(Gr. *sarx*). The story of the Jesus is the story of the Word become flesh.”²⁷ When we observe the works of Jesus engaged in the affairs of humanity, we witness God with us.

Most scholars hold that chapter 21 is the epilogue to the Gospel since John 20:30 concludes with a statement of purpose, and chapter 21 begins a new account, which John 21:14 reports as the third appearance of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples. (A closer scrutiny demonstrates that this account tells the story of the fourth appearance of Jesus because he had previously appeared to Mary in John 20:11-18, to the disciples in John 20:19 and 24-29).

Regarding the location of chapter 21, O’Day states, “The consensus of scholarly opinions is that chapter 21 is a secondary addition to the Gospel and should be read as an epilogue. Yet it is important to note that all of the most ancient manuscripts of John contain this chapter.”²⁸ Though considered an epilogue, Harris believes that chapter 21 is an integral part of the original composition of the Fourth Gospel.²⁹

John 21 is significant because it portrays the future life of Jesus’ disciples. More specifically, 21:15-19, tells the story of Peter’s future, clarifying his destiny. It records Peter’s restoration after having denied Jesus upon his arrest. In order to communicate this story, the writer chose the narrative in the form of a Gospel. The writer uses the method of dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Similarly, the writer of Exodus 3 utilizes this same dialogical tool when portraying the encounter of Moses and Yahweh on Mount Horeb.

²⁷ Gail O’Day, “Notes” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 1950.

²⁸ Gail O’Day, “Notes” in *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 1950.

²⁹ W. H. Harris, III, “Exegetical Commentary on John 21,” *Series: Commentary on the Gospel of John:13*, accessed January 20, 2014, <https://bible.org/taxonomy/author/w-hall-harris-iii>.

Historical Background

Most scholars say that the authorship of the Gospel of John is anonymous. O'Day states, "As with all the gospels its difficult to be precise about the authorship."

Furthermore, she explains that John 21:24 provides information regarding the tradition. It refers to an eyewitness whose testimony forms the bases of the Gospel story. Verse 21:20 refer to this witness "as the disciple whom Jesus loves." This unnamed disciple, while not the author of the Gospel, is portrayed as the authority for the traditions that are recounted in the Gospel.³⁰

R. Alan Culpepper offers additional information as it relates to the historical traditions of the Gospel. He believes that today most interpreters recognize that John is both history and theology in that the Fourth Gospel utilizes historical traditions while composing the Gospel with considerable freedom and creativity.³¹

Perhaps in this case, Culpepper refers to a nonconventional understanding of history since the writer of John seems to portray the narrative without adhering to the conventions of modern historiography. The theological concerns seem to supersede any attempt to convey strictly to chronology.

Significant to the interpretation of John 21:15-19 is the episode where Peter denied Jesus. Briefly, following the betrayal of Jesus, his arrest, and his audience before Annas (the father-in-law of Caiaphas), and the high priest, Peter began to follow Jesus. When Jesus went into the courtyard of the high priest, Peter stood outside the gate. When the other disciple brought Peter into the courtyard, a woman guarding the gate says to

³⁰ Gail O'Day, "The Gospel According to John," *The New Interpreter's Bible Study*, 1905.

³¹ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998).

Peter, “You ~~are~~ not also one of this man’s disciples, are you? Peter responds, “I am not” (Denial number 1).

While the high priest interrogated Jesus, Peter was warming himself around the charcoals in the courtyard. Then someone asked him, “You are not also one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and says, “I am not” (Denial number 2).

Then one of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter has severed, asks, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” For the third time Peter denies knowing Jesus and immediately, the cock crowed (Denial number 3).

These denials are far from the robust declaration that Peter had made in John 13:37, to lay down his life for Jesus. At that time Peter asks Jesus, “Lord, why can’t I follow you? I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus says, “Before the cock crows, you will deny me.

Incidents such as the arrest of Jesus, or the controversy in John chapter 9, over Jesus’ healing a blind man on the Sabbath, may have intensified the conflict between the Jewish Christians and the Jewish authorities. The reader may have a tendency to rally behind Jesus, the protagonist, and condemn the antagonist-the Jews, or the Jewish authorities, forgetting the Jewish ethnicity of Jesus.

Culpepper takes this a step further and asserts that the Gospel of John contains, anti-Jewish statements. He declares, “The Gospel of John contains some of the most hostile, anti-Jewish statements in the Christian scriptures. So sharp is the contrast between Jesus’ exhortations to his followers to love one another and the hostile

references to the Jews, that an eminent Jewish scholar at the turn of the century, commented that John is, “a gospel of Christian love and Jewish hate.”³²

Robert Kysar disagrees with Culpepper. He acknowledges that there was a struggle going on between the Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and those who did not. He further explains that Jewish Christians felt trapped between their allegiance to their Jewish roots and their new conviction that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah and speculates that this tension must have caused agony among some good people. Since the struggle is between Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews, Kysar compares their controversy to a struggle between family members. He does not deem that the intention of the Gospel was meant to be anti-Jewish.³³

Both perspectives are helpful when interpreting the Gospel. Certainly, it is important to empathize and listen to the hearts of those hurt by various interpretations and misuse of scripture. Culpepper’s insight is meaningful especially since love is the focal point of this endeavor.

Regarding word usage, a discussion of certain word and phrases will assist in a close analysis of the passage, John 21:15-14. These words include, love, feed and tend, sheep, Lord, more than these, and contrast between fasten your own belt while young and someone else will fasten a belt around you when you are old.

At Turner Chapel, emphasis has been placed on the importance of distinguishing the meanings of love since in the Greek language different words are used to refer to love. Surprisingly, most scholars hold a different position. They believe that the different

³² Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 292.

³³ Robert Kysar, *John, The Maverick Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox).

Greek words for love can be used interchangeably. In a word, there are no deeper levels of love. Culpepper helps the reader with the variations in the Greek language; his chart below presents a picture of the exchange between Jesus and Peter, highlighting the variations.

Terms Used in John 21:15-17

Jesus' Questions	Peters' Responses	Commissioning Statements
1. Do you love (<i>agapas</i>) me more than these?	Yes, Lord, you know that I love (<i>philo</i>) you.	Feed my lambs.
2. Do you love (<i>agapas</i>) me?	Yes, Lord, you know that I love (<i>philo</i>) you.	Tend my sheep.
3. Do you love (<i>phileis</i>) me?	Lord, you know everything; you know that I love (<i>phileis</i>) you?	Feed my sheep.

Culpepper points out that in the first two questions, Jesus uses *agapas* and Peter responds using *philo*. The third time Jesus changes to the verb Peter has been using. Culpepper concludes that since the writer uses these words for love interchangeably elsewhere in the Gospel, it is probably best not to place too much emphasis on the different words translated love.³⁴

Harris concurs with Culpepper. He states, "It should be noted that aside from Origen, who saw a distinction in the meaning of the two words, most of the Greek Fathers like Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria, saw no real difference of meaning. Neither did Augustine. . . . The suggestion that we should see a distinction in meaning

³⁴ Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 248.

comes from a number of British scholars of the nineteenth century. . . . most modern scholars decline to see a real difference in the meaning of the two words in context. . . .”³⁵

Furthermore, while some point out that feed describes a more restricted activity, that of feeding animal, and tend refers to guiding and protecting the flock as well as feeding, Harris elucidates that both form a general description of pastoral care.³⁶ The reference to sheep is a metaphor of those who believe in Jesus and accept his message. The question, “Do you love me more than these?” raises another question, “Who are these?” “These” may refer to Peter’s past vocation as a fisherman. “Do you love fishing more than you love me?” Or the phrase may be asking, “Do you love the disciples more than you love me?” Or it may be asking, “Do you love me more than these other disciples.”

Notably, when the narrator tells the story, it is about Jesus. When Peter addresses Jesus, Peter calls him Lord. This reference to Jesus as Lord is reminiscent of the Exodus name Yahweh discussed in the Old Testament section above. Here too it may signify the presence of God.

Lastly, O’Day elucidates that in verses 18 and 19, Jesus tells Peter a short parable constructed with parallels. Younger, fasten your own belt, and go wherever you wish, are constructed with grow old, fasten a belt around you, and take you where you do not wish to go. The parable introduces the new subject of Peter’s martyrdom.³⁷

³⁵ Harris, “Exegetical Commentary on John 21,” 11-12.

³⁶ Gail O’Day and Susan E. Hylen, *John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 203.

³⁷ O’Day and Hylen, *John*, 36.

Close Analysis

John 21:15-19 continues the opening account of chapter 21, which tells the story of the miraculous catch of fish. At this juncture in the story, after breakfast, Jesus engages Peter in a dialogue and poses three questions to him.

“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord;” you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep. He said to him a third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord you know everything; you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Jesus is commissioning Peter to demonstrate his love for him by feeding Jesus’ sheep. In other words, Jesus is saying since you love me; love my sheep by feeding them, and taking care of them. This notion of feeding and tending to a flock requires that the shepherd demonstrate a genuine heart felt concern for the sheep through actions of love. Reminiscent of this is Jesus the Good Shepherd who knows the sheep and is known by the sheep. The Good Shepherd is not a hired hand that works only with selfish motives and does not care for the sheep, but rather the Good Shepherd serves and cares for the sheep unhinged by self-serving motives and inclinations. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11-17).

Secondly, Jesus demonstrates a loving act of service and humility for the disciple when he washed their feet. Their Lord got up from the table, tied a towel around Himself, poured water in a basin, washed the disciples’ dusty feet, and wiped them with the towel.

At first, Peter refused to have his feet washed until Jesus told him that this act of service was important for their relationship. In this instance, Jesus showed his disciples how to humble themselves in a manner that addresses the other's need. O'Day elucidates, "The foot washing welcomes the disciples into the circle of God and Jesus' love"³⁸ (Jn 13:1-11).

Thirdly, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment to love one another just as he has loved them and informs them that this love will identify them as his disciples. O'Day clarifies saying that the commandment to love is not new (Lev 19:18 and Dt 6:4); what is new is the shaping of that love according to the life and death of Jesus. O'Day agrees that Jesus is calling Peter to show his love for Jesus by loving his sheep as Jesus has loved them. The meal that Jesus just prepared is an example of the work that Peter is to continue.³⁹ Jesus also taught his disciples, ministered healing to them and revealed God. Most importantly, Jesus commissions Peter to love as he has loved and this love should translate into his care of Jesus' flock.

Furthermore, O'Day indicates that the three questions concerning Peter's love for Jesus counter-balance Peter's denials of Jesus.⁴⁰ Apparently, Jesus' confidence in Peter has been restored, so he then commands Peter to continue the work that he has done, carrying it out in a loving way.

Harris explains, the significance of the entire scene in the narrative; he believes that it seems clear that it is intended to indicate Peter's complete restoration to a position

³⁸ O'Day and Hylen, *John*, 203.

³⁹ O'Day and Hylen, *John*, 203.

⁴⁰ O'Day and Hylen, *John*, 203.

of apostolic leadership after his three denials. Three times Peter had denied Jesus; three times Peter now affirms his love for his Lord, and three times Jesus commissions Peter to care for the flock of God. There could be no question on Peter's part or on the part of the other disciples that he had been completely restored.⁴¹

O'Day explains that verses 18-19 introduce the new subject of Peter's martyrdom. "Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.)

This short parable constructed with three parallel items, younger, fasten your own belt, and go wherever you wished, are contrasted with grow old, fasten a belt around you, and take you where you do not wish to go. The contrast is one of Peter's freedoms in youth and to his captivity in his old age. Most scholars read the words, stretch out your arms, as a reference to Peter's own crucifixion (the mode of Peter's death is not mentioned in the New Testament but in other early traditions about Peter). Verse 19 supports this by linking Peter's death with Jesus's death. Peter's death and Jesus' death both glorify God.⁴² As predicted Peter does lay down his life for the sake of Jesus. After having predicted Peter's future death, Jesus tells Peter, "Follow me." Jesus directs Peter to not only love like the Good Shepherd but also to lay down his life.

Conclusion

⁴¹ Harris, "Exegetical Commentary on John 21."

⁴² Gail O' Day, "Notes" in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, 1951.

Jesus' dialogue with Peter functions to direct Peter to demonstrate his love for him by feeding his sheep. Peter is commissioned to love the people that Jesus has loved and to show this love following Jesus' example of nurturing, caring, teaching the people whom Jesus will leave behind. Love in this context does not have levels such as God's love verses brotherly or sisterly love. Rather agapas and philias are used interchangeably in the Gospel of John. An illustration of loving as Jesus did may be seen in the parable of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows the sheep, and the sheep know the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd is not a hired hand that works with selfish motives. Rather, the Good Shepherd loves, cares, and protects the flock. A second portrayal of how Jesus loved is seen in the episode where Jesus took a table and a basin and washes the disciples feet. By doing this Jesus demonstrates humility and hospitable service to the disciples. In the passage, Jesus shows love to the disciples after having orchestrated the miraculous catch of fish.

After having fished all through the night, the next morning Jesus prepared breakfast for them. This act of love met them at their utmost need. In addition, Jesus gives the disciples a new command (also, in the Old Testament) to love one another and helps them understand that their love identifies them as Jesus' disciples.

Furthermore, this passage is interpreted in the light of Peter's denial. After Jesus was arrested, Peter denied him three times. Jesus queries Peter three times as it relates to whether or not he loves him. The denial probably necessitated a counter response, a declaration of love, since Jesus knew Peter's destiny to shepherd the flock. Peter's declaration of love restores his relationship with Jesus. Jesus signifies his forgiveness and

confidence in Peter by giving him an assignment to feed his flock. Jesus tells Peter to demonstrate his love for him by feeding Jesus' sheep.

Just as the book of Exodus functions to reveal the identity of God so does the Gospel of John. The Gospel functions to reveal God's identity through the life and works of Jesus. Jesus commissions Peter in John 21:15-19 to feed his sheep, a metaphor for serving the people as a shepherd would. Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11-17. The reference here to feeding the sheep identifies a metaphor for a ministerial identity of the clergy, that is, the role of a Good Shepherd who feeds the sheep. The Good Shepherd is not merely a hired hand that works only with selfish motives and does not care for the sheep, but rather, cares for the sheep unhinged by self-serving motives and inclinations. The Good Shepherd lays down his or her life for the sheep, sacrifices for the sheep. The Good Shepherd knows the sheep and the sheep know the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd loves, cares and protects the flock.

In addition, Jesus shows himself to be humble when he washes his disciples feet and hospitable when he prepares breakfast for his disciples. Jesus helps his disciples understand that love identifies them as his disciples. The implication for ministerial identity is that humility, hospitality, and love are characteristics that can empower clergy to fulfill their divine calling.

Furthermore, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. Peter declares his love three times, and Jesus commissions Peter three times to feed his sheep. This dialogue between Jesus and Peter seems to parallel Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus. Interestingly, Jesus commissions Peter to feed his sheep, to serve his people despite the fact, as a result of fear, Peter had denied him three times. But Peter assures Jesus of his love, and Jesus

probably never stopped loving Peter even though Peter has denied him. The relationship is restored. Just as Jesus restored Peter after his failure, ministers can counter on the restoration of Jesus when they fail.

Who is Jesus in this scenario? Jesus is the one who loves, forgives, and restores, humanity. Jesus calls ministers to demonstrate their love for him like the Good Shepherd by loving people. This love is expressed when the minister cares for the people, protects the people, teaches the people- serving them in a spirit of humility and hospitality. Seemingly, the knowledge of who Jesus is can affirm and empower clergy who struggle with insecurities, anxieties, and questions in regards to fulfilling their divine calling and who sometimes feel unworthy of such a high calling.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

The overriding purpose for the historical inquiry is to explore interpretations of the call to ministry and to understand the implications for the context, Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marietta, Georgia. After having pursued a retrospective exploration of this theme, it was discovered that the call has been interpreted in numerous ways. For instance, the call has meant a call to salvation, a call to carry out a specific task, a call to monastic life, a call to view all work as a summons from God, a call to ordained ministry, a call to preach, and a call that entails other ministries than preaching such as teaching, pastoral care and counseling. In addition, the call has referred to one's story or narrative, which recalls the account of a divine summons to undertake a specific task or ministry. That which links each of these various calls or call stories is the intuitive notion that God, the Holy Spirit has initiated and spoken the call; the summons, the commission, the mandate has come directly from God, the Holy Spirit. William C. Placher elucidates, "Central to the many Christian interpretations of vocation is the idea that there is something-my vocation or calling—God has called me to do with my life, and my life has meaning and purpose at least in part because I am fulfilling my calling" (Placher uses vocation and calling inter-

changeably).¹ Placher admittedly takes a simplified approach and points out that there are roughly four broad periods in history when calling has had different meanings.² Herein is a brief review of what calling has meant during these periods. Furthermore, a more specific examination of the interpretation of the call to ministry from the perspective of the African American Protestant church is undertaken. Finally, the search for what the call to ministry mean in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and, more specifically, in the context is investigated.

A Succinct Meaning of the Call In Four Historical Periods

The four historical periods in Placher's discourse include an interpretation of calling in the early church, 100-500, calling in the Middle Ages, 500-1500, calling after the Reformation, 1500-1800, and calling after the 1800's to the present."³ Firstly, Placher paints a different picture of what a Christian faced in the early church in contrast to what a Christian faces today. When looking at the first several hundred years of a Christian's life, we see that they were in the minority, and they joined the church as adults. Their response to the call (in Greek, *Klesis*) made them outsiders to most of society; therefore, they were unable to participate in the social life of the dominant culture. They refused to perform the sacrifices of the Roman imperial cult. Though the risk was small, being a Christian meant the possibility that you might be arrested, tortured, or put to death. The

¹ William C. Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 2.

² Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom*, 6.

³ Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom*, vii-x.

fundamental question concerning a person's calling was, "Should I be a Christian?" or "How public should I be about my Christian faith?"⁴

One person who chose to become a Christian and not betray her calling by denying it or sacrificing to the emperor was a young woman named Perpetua. She was martyred in 203 CE along with other new converts who were studying to become Christians.⁵ Perpetua resolved to be a Christian even though her father vehemently objected. During this period, being a Christian seemed to set one at odds with one's family. The following discourse reveals such a conversation that Perpetua had with her father.

While we were still under arrest (she said), my father out of love for me was trying to persuade me and shake my resolution. 'Father,' said I, 'do you see this vase here, for example, or water pot or whatever?' 'Yes, I do,' said he. And I told him, 'Could it be called by any other name than what it is?' And he said, 'No.' 'Well, so too I can not be called anything other than what I am, a Christian.'⁶

Perpetua's decision to be a Christian tormented her father. Surprisingly, he was persecuted as well. Perpetua recounts, "When my father persisted in trying to dissuade me, Hilarianus (the governor) ordered him to be thrown to the ground and beaten with a rod. I felt sorry for father, just as if I myself had been beaten. I felt sorry for his pathetic old age."⁷

Our context today is far removed from the notion that any of us might be martyred as a result of the call to be or become a Christian. We seem to exist in a way that takes the choice to become and live out our lives as Christians for granted. It is

⁴ Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom*, 6.

⁵ Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom*, 39.

⁶ Placher, "The Martyrdom of Perpetua," 39.

⁷ Placher, "The Martyrdom of Perpetua," 42.

difficult to determine what one would do when confronted head on with death. The historical view of calling in the early church that becoming a Christian could possibly have led to death does challenge our context to ask the questions, “Is there anything, any belief, any one, or any faith conviction for which we would die?” Since we are not called literally to die for our faith in our context then, perhaps, we might in light of the dynamic testimonies of past martyrs challenge ourselves to figuratively die by adhering to counter-culture values that reflect the Christian faith such as love, forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice, to name a few.

After Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, became a Christian during the fourth century, Christians no longer encountered persecution. Now it was easy to become a Christian, so much so, that being a Christian enhanced one’s position in society and helped a person climb the social ladder. Placher asks a relevant question as it relates to this social shift impacting the life of the Christian. He asks what did Christians do when it was easy to become a Christian. And answers by saying that some of them went to the desert to become monks, and “found their callings in lives of radical self-denial that preserved the dramatic challenge of Christianity.”⁸

This shift in status for the Christian seems to precipitate the rise of the monastic order. Christians felt called to leave everything behind—family, wealth, friends, society— and retreat to the desert. Athanasius (about 296-373 CE) is said to have met Antony, a most influential hermit, in the Egyptian desert and relays his story. Athanasius explains, “...he (Antony) persuaded many to embrace the solitary life. And thus it happened in the end that cells arose even in the mountains, and the desert was colonized

⁸ Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom*, 6.

by monks, who came forth from their own people, and enrolled themselves for citizenship in heaven.”⁹

A call to leave family, friends, church, society, and to liquidate one’s assets and donate them to the poor is a mute voice in my context. For Antony and other hermits, perhaps, this lifestyle was a kind of figurative dying to self. Perhaps, from hearing the account of the ancient hermit, ministers, for example, might do a self-evaluation and recommit to the disciplines of the Christian faith. We may be encouraged to continue embracing the traditional disciplines of the church such as daily prayer, self-denial as acted out during the Lenten season, fasting, repentance, forgiveness, and generosity. Furthermore, after having reflected upon how Antony, a wealthy man, responded to the call to retreat and gave away all of his possession, I am yet pondering what giving away all that one has means to a middle class person or one with little resources. What is the impact of the sacrificial giving in light of class stratification? Lastly, the choice to leave family—Antony answered the called to leave family and entered a life of solitude. How one does this remains a mystery to me.

Secondly, during the period of the Middle Aged (500-1500 CE), the majority of Christians grew up in the church. The calling that concerned them was what type of Christian should I be. Some felt called to be priests, monks, nuns, or friars. The medieval Christians fulfilled their calling by joining the priesthood or entering a monastery. Placher considers choosing between a religious calling and family the central choice that the Christian had to make during this period.¹⁰

⁹ Placher, Athanasius, “The Life of Antony,” 65.

¹⁰ Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom Calling*, 6-7.

Thirdly, during the era after the Reformation, a shift took place; every job was viewed as a calling. Placher helps us see that among Protestants not only priests, nuns, and monks, were called by God to their particular work, but also your job was considered your calling; a person could be called to be a preacher or called to service in government, commerce, farming, or other occupations.¹¹ Martin Luther, a major influential proponent of this view also held the notion that baptism consecrated all as priest. He stated,

Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2:9, 'Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,' and the book of Revelation says, 'Thou hast made us by Thy blood to be priests and kings' (5:10). . . . Therefore when the bishop consecrates it is the same thing as if he, in the place of the whole congregation, all of whom have like power, were to take one out of their number and charge him to use this power for the others."¹²

Even though Luther held the view that baptism consecrates a person a priest, bishop, and pope, he qualifies this position stating that one should not exercise these offices unless elected by the Christian community. Luther explained,

For whoever comes out the water of baptism can boast that he is already consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, though it is not seemly that everyone should exercise the office. Nay, just because we are all in like manner priests, no one must put himself forward and undertake, without our consent and election, to do what is in the power of all of us. For what is common to all, no one dare take upon himself without the will and the command of the community; . . . Therefore a priest in Christendom is nothing else than an officeholder.¹³

Martin Luther's point of view apparently empowered the laity and helped Protestants to value their occupation as a calling from God. Fulfilling this calling probably gave them a sense of meaning and purpose. What would have concerned me is what Henlee H. Barnette refers to as conservatism and quietism. According to Barnette the conservatism

¹¹ Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom Calling*, 7.

¹² Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom Calling*, 212.

¹³ Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom Calling*, 212, 213.

and quietism resulted from Luther's emphasis upon persons remaining in their station after the call. Luther urged Christians to suffer a tyrant rather than engage in a rebellion, appealing only to the ruler and prayer.¹⁴ For persons to remain in their station seems to restrict the voice of the Holy Spirit from calling a person to carry out more than one mission or hinder changing missions. To remain in the same station also could possibly hinder social mobility and discourage the inclination to strive for equality, encouraging a person to remain comfortable in a caste system or an oppression society since the call comes from God.

On the other hand, the notion that the Holy Spirit is present among us and calling us to our specific assignment and tasks seems to ensue a type of utopian harmony in a sense that we are all on assignment, working together for the benefit of everybody. At Turner Chapel, the Holy Spirit seems to have called not only preachers, teachers, pastors, and pastoral counselors, but also administrators, accountants, doctors, nurses, computer instructors, choir directors and the list goes on. There are people in this church who believe that the Spirit has gifted them to carry out their assignment, in other words, their calling from God; therefore, they fulfill their calling by ministering within the church and community. Whether or not the calling extends into the workplace may or may not take place.

Fourthly, during the 1800's until the present, numerous meanings of calling emerged. There were those who challenged the Reformed idea that everyone's work was his or her calling while others such as Placher viewed his occupation as a college teacher

¹⁴ Henlee H. Barnette, *Christian Calling and Vocation* (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Book House: 1965), 45.

richly rewarding and believed that it was what God had called him to do.¹⁵ Howard Thurman in a sermon entitled, “What Shall I Do With my Life,” preaching to an audience of college students dealt with the idea of calling, expounding upon his love for Jesus who sheds light on the answer to this question.¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer viewed obedience to Christ as a calling; he states, “The call to follow means . . . adherence to the person of Jesus Christ and fellowship with him. The life of discipleship is not the hero-worship we would pay to a good master, but obedience to the Son of God.”¹⁷ Barnette points out that in our contemporary time there is little connection between the secular jobs that people do in factories and corporations and a sense of a Christian calling.¹⁸ This disconnection between a job and a sense of calling for some in our contemporary society could possibly display a utilitarian approach to work. In this instance, it seems that people may work to make ends meet; therefore, their work may not give them a sense of meaning, fulfillment, and purpose.

In summary, seemingly from the early church to the contemporary period, the view of calling has undergone different interpretations. Calling has meant choosing to become a Christian with the possibility of martyrdom resulting from this choice. It has meant doing away with all of one’s material possessions and deciding to retreat from family, friends, community, and society in order to live a faithful life in the desert as a hermit. Calling has summoned persons to accept religious orders, whereby; they have become monks, nuns, friars, and priest. Calling has also meant broadening the call from

¹⁵ Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom*, 32.

¹⁶ Placher, Howard Thurman, “What Shall I Do With my Life,” 385, 388.

¹⁷ Plactcher, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, ” 399.

¹⁸ Barnette, *Christian Calling and Vocation*, 48.

the religious vocation to include all work done in the marketplace. Interestingly, in today's pluralist society it appears that these various interpretations co-exist with a similar thread running through them. That thread is the belief that the call originates with God.

Call To Ministry From the Black Church Perspective: A Concise View

In the Protestant Black church it appears that the call to ministry, the call to preach, the call to the ordained ministry may refer interchangeably to the encounter with God, whereby the divine summons a person to enter the ordained Christian ministry. A person's encounter as well as the retelling of the story of the encounter is known as his or her call story or call narrative. Williams H. Myers elucidates this experience; he says, "The call is first and foremost a story—an oral accounting—about a human—divine encounter. It is the narrator's retrospective attempt to articulate a divine mission—a call to ministry. In addition, the call as story is the interpreter's attempt to reconstruct the chronological account of what happened"¹⁹ Myers distinguishes between the call story and the call narrative. He explains that the call story is a chronological attempt to tell what happened during the divine encounter while the call narrative is a transformation of the story told in order to persuade the community of the authenticity of the call; the narrative is a retrospective interpretation of the story. "At the narrative level, hermeneutical retrospection allows the narrator to claim greater knowledge, understanding, certainty, clarity, and stability than is evident at the story level."²⁰ In other

¹⁹ William H. Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No: Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company, 1994), 17.

²⁰ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 7,11.

words, in retrospect the person is able to retell their story after having meditated, reflected and gained some understanding and clarity as it relates to their encounter with the divine.

After having studied and analyzed a collection of call narratives, Myers identified three types.

- Type A—cataclysmic/reluctant: persons connect some momentous event or events to the call which may be interpreted as supernatural or natural; they are reluctant and resist the call for a number of reasons; after surrendering to the call, they report having experienced joy, peace, fulfillment, or relief of a burden.
- Type B—noncataclysmic/reluctant: persons have no cataclysmic moments in their story; their call unfolds gradually; they may have begun resistance during their early religious exposure; confirmation occurs with a series of events; no one event is viewed as the key to self-understanding the call; the faith community's sanction is equally as important as tracing the call to a point in time. Some persons may express relief and peace at having accepted the call.
- Type C—noncataclysmic/nonreluctant: persons assert that they have always known that they had been called; they have never wanted any other vocation in life; they view the call as a part of their destiny, so they did not resist it. Sanction from the faith community is important.²¹

In the Black church, the call appears to function as a person's entry into the ordained ministry. Myers sees it as a "rite of passage."²² The person may share with his or her pastor and faith community the encounter with the divine, whereby; God has called him or her to preach. In a sense it appears that reducing the call to the ordained ministry to the call to preach does the faith community a disservice and limits the mission of the divine. On a broad scope people within the Christian faith may be called to minister as theologians, pastors, teachers, pastoral counselors, ministers of music, chaplains, urban

²¹ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 71,72,73.

²² Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 117.

ministers, and so forth: The needs of the church and the community are vast, so calling and ordaining people to do other ministries than preach seems within the realm of what the divine might do. Myers helps me understand that to conceive of the call to ordained ministry as significantly more than the call to preach is a minority view within the Black church.²³

Myers presents, Mack King Carter's retrospective account of his call to ordained ministry. Carter's reinterpretation of his call shed light on the concept of the call to preach and demonstrates how a person's understanding of what God calls them to do seems to evolve. He states,

However, as the years have passed on, I have learned and as I pursued the New Testament in a far deeper sense, I articulate my calling in a little different fashion since that particular event. First of all, I think the whole issue of the call has been misunderstood not only by blacks, but it's been misunderstood by white people also. In a broad sense, in the New Testament there is no such thing as 'the call to preach' as we have articulated. Everybody is called to preach in the New Testament sense, and the call to preach is inseparable and cannot be extricated from the call to salvation. When I'm called to salvation, I'm also called to preach in the sense of spreading the word. What we have confused with a call to preach is the cultural phenomenon of sermonizing. Sermonizing is not biblical. Sermonizing is cultural. . . . Therefore, usually we would say that in my case, prior to really coming to grips with this I was saved in 1953 and I was called to preach in 1966. I personally articulated it in this fashion now. I was saved in 1953 and called to preach in the New Testament sense in 1953; but I received a special anointing in 1966 to be a pastor-teacher, upon which I later would go on and receive training for the gift that God had given me in this particular area.²⁴

Carter not only holds a minority view in the Black church, but also it is radically different and seems to claim that every Christian is called to preach. At Turner Chapel, to see both the clergy and laity as having been called by God to preach and to intentionally make the distinction between sermonizing and preaching might possibly amount to a paradigm

²³ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 2,3.

²⁴ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 217.

shift. The laity is encouraged to witness concerning the good news of Jesus Christ and to serve in areas where they are gifted and passionate. The clergy, though expected to articulate a call to preach, are encouraged to examine prayerfully all of their gifts and passions so that they may discern where God is calling them to serve and what God is calling them to do. By not starting with the expectation that a candidate for ordination is called to preach, Renita Weems points out the insight that women in ministry have brought to the table. She explains,

But, see, one of the things about asking about your calling, you still haven't asked is 'Called to what?' You know, you are assuming that it's preaching. And I think that one of the things that especially women bring to this new movement of the ministry is that we are reinterpreting what it means to be in ministry. We are reinterpreting ministry. . . . I think that our presence in the ministry forces the church, forces us, forces our colleagues to have to rethink ministry, rethink gifts, rethink the notion that in the black church only the preaching ministry is the ordained ministry in our churches. That needs to be seriously rethought, because many of us come with all kinds of other gifts, whether it's gifts of administration, and some of the men do too. I would hope that our presence even opens doors for them to be able to exercise other kinds of gifts and really give thought to developing other kind of gifts. . . . I know that I was called to the ministry ten years ago but I think now, ten years later, I would say that it wasn't just the preaching ministry. . . . Ten years ago I might have articulated it as the preaching ministry, because I didn't know anything else.²⁵

Perhaps, if those responsible for verifying, authorizing, and admitting persons into the process of becoming ordained ministers—such as the Board of Examiners in the AME Church—would experiment with Weems notion of ordaining persons to ministries other than the preaching ministry then, the church might be able to evaluate the merit of this position; to do this would probably require a paradigm shift. In the AME Church, for example, a candidate for ministry is expected to articulate a call to preach. The church is open to a branching out into other acts of ministry such as the chaplaincy, if the

²⁵ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 218.

respective episcopal leadership sanctions the inclusion. But the entrance point is the hearing of the call to preach articulated to the pastor by the candidate for ordained ministry.

Interestingly, the call story has a rich historical tradition in the Black religious experience. William, an ex-slave, in his account of his conversion experience also tells the story of his call to preach. William states,

When God called me I had applied in hell, but my name wasn't on the roll. I saw a sharp-eyed looking man, and he seemed to be walking back and forth from one end of a workshop to the other and looking at a book. I went to ask him if my name was in the book, and he snapped, 'No!' It was from here that God delivered my soul, turned me around, and gave me my orders. I saw myself on the same broad road I had seen so much of in the spirit. As I went along, a voice called out, 'Oh, William! Oh, William! Oh, William!' When he said that he turned me around out of the big road into a little path, my face being toward the east. He spoke again and said, 'Go preach my gospel to every creature and fear not, for I am with you, an everlasting prop. Amen.'²⁶

In the nineteenth century, Jarena Lee received the call to preach. She described her call saying,

Between four and five years after my sanctification, on a certain time, silence fell upon me, and I stood as if some one was about to speak to me, yet I had no such thought in my heart. But to my utter surprise there seemed to sound a voice which I thought I distinctly heard, and most certainly understood, which said to me, 'Go preach the Gospel!' I immediately replied aloud, 'No one will believe me.' Again I listened, and again the same voice seemed to say, 'Preach the Gospel; I will put words in your mouth, and will turn your enemies to become your friends

At first I suppose that Satan had spoken to me, for I had read that he could transform himself into an angel of light, for the purpose of deception. Immediately I went into a secret place, and called upon the Lord to know if he had called me to preach, and whether I was deceived or not; when there appeared

²⁶ Clifton H. Johnson, ed., "Hooked and in the Heart" *God Struck me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves*, (Eugene, OR Wipf and Stock, 2010), 21.

to my view the form and figure of a pulpit, with a Bible lying thereon, the back of which was presented to me as plainly as if it had been a literal fact.²⁷

After having heard the voice of the Lord, Lee went to tell the preacher in charge of the African Society, Reverend Richard Allen, that the Lord had revealed to her that she must preach. Allen replied that among Methodists, a Mrs. Cook had requested the opportunity to preach but had been permitted to exhort and hold prayer meeting; the Discipline did not call for women preachers. Lee stated that the words of Allen smothered the holy energy and fire that had been within. Upon later retrospection Lee admonished us to be careful that the by-laws of church government do not go against “the word of life,” that is, the will of God.²⁸

Even though the call story has historically functioned as a point of entry into the ordained ministry, it seems that regardless of the content of the story some persons movement forward has been either retarded or ceased completely based merely upon gender. Some churches have based this position on their interpretation of scripture and, therefore, have excluded women from entering the ordained ministry. Myers elucidates a most insightful and illuminating point as it relates to this issue. He says, “In fact, neither in the life of the religious community, nor in these (call) stories does the call to ministry begin by debating scripture. The call to ministry begins as a story; a story of an encounter between an individual and God.”²⁹ What Myers seems to be pointing out is the notion that standards and criteria for validating and authorizing a man’s call are different from

²⁷ William L. Andrews, ed., “My Call to Preach the Gospel,” *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 35.

²⁸ Andrews, “My Call to Preach the Gospel,” 36.

²⁹ Myers, *God’s Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 7.

those used to validate and authorize a woman's call. Myers challenges us to wrestle with the possibility that the phenomenon of the call may have outlived its usefulness since some believe that it can be a valuable piece of data for legitimating a man's call to ministry but not a woman's.³⁰ Myers has invested a great deal of academic energy and analysis to the phenomenon of the call in the Protestant Black church. It is doubted that he seriously wants the church to eradicate the call from the process of receiving persons in to the ordained ministry of the church. Perhaps, Myers is admonishing us to rethink how we reject women based solely on gender, and his point seems logical and valid.

Regarding the ordination of women in African Methodist denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was the first to ordain a woman. Julia A. J. Foote was ordained a deacon in the New York Conference in 1894 and an elder in 1898. The African Methodist Episcopal Church approved the licensing of women as local preachers in 1888, prohibiting them from receiving an appointment to a church, defining their role as evangelists. The AME Church began ordaining women as local deacons in 1948 and local elders in 1956. The *1952 Discipline of the AME Church* states that women are included in the ordination of local deacon but in no case shall they receive itinerant orders. In 1960 women were ordained to the itinerant order as deacons and elders.³¹

When comparing the sections on "The Ministry" in the *Bicentennial Book of Discipline—1984 of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* with the *Book of Discipline—2008 of African Methodist Episcopal Church*, the position of the church

³⁰ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 191.

³¹ Sandra E. H. Smith Blair, "Her Story of Women in Ministry in African Methodism" accessed June 7, 2014, www.sedwim.org/Herstory--7.thm--SED Women in Ministry, 1, 2.

seems to be that those articulating a call to the ordained ministry have received the call to preach. Discipline 1984 reads: “Section A. The Call to Preach: Examination of Persons called to preach: Those who think they are moved by the Holy Spirit to preach shall be tried by the following examination.”³² Discipline 2008 reads: “Section A: The Call To Preach: Persons seeking license to preach in the AME Church shall be asked the following questions.”³³ There is a section in Discipline 2008 that differs from Discipline 1984 in that the 2008 Discipline has a section in the bylaws of the African Methodist Episcopal Woman in Ministry, (AME/WIM), that appears to affirm other callings. Article II, Section 2., Objective f. reads, “To affirm specialized ministries, for example: chaplaincy, writing, teaching, counseling, research, prison, youth, geriatric, singles, street, health care, families/life relations, music, homeless, HIV/AIDS, and religious education ministries.”³⁴ In 1992 the 44th Session of the General Conference adopted the objective and nine others put forth by the Connectional African Methodist Episcopal Women in Ministry. Perhaps, this move may help the African Methodist Episcopal Church rethink and view the call to the ordained ministry in a more inclusive way and not reduce it to solely the call to preach.

Myers challenges the Black church to think in terms of call to ministry as opposed to what he refers to as the overly reductionist phrase call to preach. He states that when the New Testament addresses gifts, gifted people, and offices, a variety of ministries is

³² The Compilation Committee, ed., *The Book of Discipline The Bicentennial Edition of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—1984* (Nashville, TN: The AMEC Sunday School Union, 1984), 89.

³³ The Compilation Committee, ed, *The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—2008* (Nashville, TN: AMEC Sunday School Union, 2009), 84.

³⁴ The Compilation Committee—2008, 442.

always listed and none of them is reduced to the call to preach. Noting, the myriad of problems in the Black communities, Myers states,

We must begin to recognize ministries and ministers on a basis other than that of someone's cultural preaching ability. Ministry is not limited to or defined primarily by preaching. In fact, not even the pastoral ministry is defined by preaching. Rather, this ministry is filled by what the New Testament calls the pastor-teacher. . . . Youth ministers could fulfill this type ministry with youth; a counseling minister could fulfill this type of ministry with a variety of age groups; the minister of administration could fulfill aspects of this ministry. Yet none of these ministers should be forced to think of their ministry in terms of preaching, anymore than the senior pastor should think of his or her ministry only in terms of preaching.³⁵

Myers' challenge to the Black church sounds reasonable. To encourage pastors and examining boards to hear call stories and narratives in the light of the candidate's passion and giftedness to serve in ministries geared towards youth, administration, pastoral care and counseling, the teaching ministry of the church, or the seminary ministries other than the preaching ministry, might give persons the opportunity to fulfill their calling as led by the Holy Spirit and not force them to attempt to make themselves fit into the traditional structure of the denomination.

To institute this new paradigm in the African Methodist Episcopal Church would probably mean a change in disciplinary law. Undertaking this effort may require a majority vote at the seat of the General Conference. This seems like quite a lofty goal that someone may choose to undertake. In the meantime, perhaps on a lower scale, pastors and clergy serving on examining boards might do a retrospective interpretation of their own call narratives, similar to what Mack King Carter and Renita Weems have done. By doing this they may discover that their interpretation of the call to preach has broadened to the point where they now see themselves called to other significant ministries that

³⁵ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, 235, 236.

might render service to the church, the community, or the world. Hopefully, from their own experience they may be awakened to the possibility that reducing the call to ordained ministry, to the call to preach, may hinder a ministerial candidate's potential to fulfill their destiny in ministry.

Conclusion

Historically, the call or calling has been understood to have a variety of meanings. To illustrate, the call has meant a call to salvation, a call to carry out a specific task, a call to monastic life, a call to view all work as a summons from God, a call to ordained ministry, a call to preach, and a call that entails other acts of service than preaching such as teaching, pastoral care and counseling. In addition, the call refers to a person's story or narrative, which recalls the account of God's summons to undertake a specific task or ministry. In this project the focus is upon a calling to the ordained ministry which refers to the intuitive notion that God, the Holy Spirit has summoned or commissioned a person to carry out an act or acts of service as one ordained by the Christian church.

Perhaps, a reinterpretation of the clergy person's call narrative (the retrospective account of their divine encounter of hearing what the Holy Spirit has commissioned them to do) could demonstrate how callings in ministry can evolve. For example, in the context, the unilateral question is: "Are you called to preach?" with expectation that the majority who answer this call will serve as senior pastor of a church. After living with the call for a number of years clergy may expand their view of what God expects them to do.

Some historical issues the clergy struggle with that can cause insecurities, anxieties, and questions include the following: 1) Even though the call story has historically functioned as a point of entry into ordained ministry, regardless of the content of the story, persons are hindered or rejected merely because of their gender; 2) The context supports a multi-staffed ministry whereby clergy serve as senior pastor, co-pastor, executive pastor, youth pastor, pastor of care and comfort. On a voluntary basis clergy serve in capacities such as young adult pastor, leaders of discipleship, membership, golden agers (over fifty), and evangelism ministries. Episcopal leaders have questioned the validity of clergy serving on a multiple staff. Also, denominational expectations differ from that of the clergy as it relates to carrying out their calling. Many clergy are expected to serve as senior pastor of a church. On occasion there seems to be a disconnection between what the general church (the hierarchy of the African Methodist Episcopal Church above the local church) calls the clergy to do and what the clergy believes God is calling him or her to do. The disconnection feeds the struggle to fulfill the calling.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

The purpose of this discourse is to explore the call to ministry from a theological perspective mindful of the problem in the project's context, Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marietta, Georgia (here after referred to as the context). The problem is that there are clergy and licentiates who are struggling with insecurities, anxieties, and questions as it pertains to fulfilling their divine call. The focus areas investigated are the identity question as it relates to ministers and discernment of their call. Perhaps some theological insight concerning these areas of focus may help to empower clergypersons as they strive to carry out their divine assignment.

The Identity Question

A most significant theological approach to viewing the calling or vocation of an individual is through the lens of one's identity as a Christian. Some theologians point out that this identity is rooted in discipleship established at the hour of a person's baptism into the body of Christ. This is a broad notion of calling that includes both the laity and the clergy. For example, Kathleen A. Cahalan, a theologian at Saint John's University School of Theology-Seminary, seems to hold this view. She states, "Discipleship is the self-identity and shared calling common to all members of the Christian community. Disciples are constituted in baptism as followers of Christ, an immersion that personally

vocationally, and socially ‘orders’ their relationship to God and neighbor in a new way...”¹ Cahalan explains further that vocation is a distinctive calling that arises from discipleship through the Spirit’s gifts; a quality that applies to all disciples. What distinguishes the clergy person is the set of gifts bestowed by the Spirit. She clarifies, “Charisms (particular gifts) can be seen as the way God calls us, through the Spirit’s prompts, in the course of our adult lives to offer gifts for the good of the community. Charisms, then, are the pneumatological foundation of vocation and mission.”² In a capsule, Cahalan, appears to say that ordained ministry is a distinct calling among many callings rooted in discipleship, which exist within the Christian community and is carried out through a distinctive set of gifts. It is “the vocation of leading disciples in the life of discipleship for the sake of God’s mission in the world.”³ Cahalan seems to firmly believe that all disciples share in the same fundamental call and that call is to follow Christ, yet she does appear to acknowledge uniqueness between the role of the laity and the clergy. She elucidates, “If there is anything unique about the vocation of ministry it is that it is directly related to the flourishing of discipleship in the Christian community and in the world. And in this regard ministers are in a unique position to care about and for the vocation of all Christians.”⁴

Mark Fowler, vice-president for vocation in ministry and associate professor of church leadership at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, seems to further embrace

¹ Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 49.

² Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 34.

³ Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 50.

⁴ Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, 50.

the theological significance of the relationship between a person's calling and identity. He states, "The experience of call sharpens an awareness and definition of identity. It is experienced as something whose source and purpose are beyond the self. In the Christian context, calling also offers the affirmation of belonging to God and having a part in the divine vocation."⁵ Both Fowler and Cahalan appear to purport the broad concept of calling that is constituted in baptism. Followers of Christ both lay and clergy may listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit in order to hear whom God is calling them to be and to discern what role to play in the divine vocation. For those called to ordained ministry, especially but not exclusively, Fowler deems it important for individuals to be able to articulate the call; he states, "Articulating one's call means struggling with the questions, "Who am I? What is God calling me to do? What gifts do I have that God desires me to use?" Seemingly, the ability to articulate the answers to these questions will not only enable the minister to capture his or her identity in light of the calling, but also struggling with the identity question will possibly empower ministers to speak confidently with the ecclesiastical examining board of which they may be accountable.

Cahalan and Fowler's notion that the identity of both the laity and the clergy is established in the sacrament of baptism and rooted in discipleship does have its merit and may have its foundation in the gospel of Matthew chapter three. The gospel writer records the narrative of Jesus' baptism by John. The gospel states that just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, coming upon him. Then a voice from heaven, God's voice, identified Jesus saying, "This is my one dear Son; in him I take great delight" (NET). As followers of

⁵ Mark A. Fowler, *Mentoring into Vocation: Touchstones for the Journey* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry the United Methodist Church, 2006), 110.

Christ, disciples, we may also acknowledge that our identity was constituted in our baptism. Yet in the context the emphasis may rest upon one's salvation experience and relationship with Christ, which not only identifies a person as a disciple but also establishes the liberating and reconciling work of Christ in a person's daily walk. Both the laity and the clergy are called to follow Christ and are encouraged to discover who they are in Christ in terms of identifying their spiritual gifts, their passion, their abilities, their personality, and examining their past experiences (especially their painful ones). Based on Ephesians chapter four, verse twelve, the clergy, as designated leaders, may equip the laity for the works of ministry.

In the light of the various contemporary metaphors that identify the pastor in diverse ways such as media mogul, political negotiator, therapist, manager, resident activist, preacher, and servant,⁶ William H. Willimon, a Bishop of the United Methodist Church and Thomas C. Oden, Henry Anson Buttz Professor of Theology at Drew University, portray their theological perspectives as it relates more specifically to the call and identity of the pastoral ministry. Firstly, Willimon asks two questions and then proceeds to answers them. Willimon asks the questions, "Who are pastors? What are they for? For twenty centuries the church has called some from among the baptized to serve as leaders and to fulfill the role of pastor."⁷ Willimon further states that a relevant metaphor for the pastor seems to address what he refers to as the church's imperative agenda to be counter-cultural. He seems to view the church and its beliefs standing markedly against culture. He uses the metaphor of persons experiencing the culture of a foreign land to

⁶ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 56-68.

⁷ Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, 30.

make his point. Therefore, the pastor is seen as a missionary, more accurately a lead missionary or as an equipper of other missionaries. In addition, pastors must have the capacity to lead in catechesis (instruction concerning the classical tenets of the faith), moral formation, and the regeneration of God's people.⁸ Affirming the vocational call established in baptism, Willimon seems to insist that the pastor's identity is a lead missionary of other missionaries, challenging the contemporary culture with the tenets found in classical forms of Christian ministry as articulated in Scripture, creeds, and tradition.

Secondly, Oden identifies the pastor as a member of the body of Christ who is called by God and the church, set apart by ordination representatively to proclaim the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to guide and nurture the Christian community towards what he views as a full response to God's self-disclosure.⁹ Seemingly, the pastor's identity is a response to a revelation of the divine identity. Perhaps, this is why Oden maintains the classic identity of the Good Shepherd, as Jesus is portrayed in the gospel of John chapter ten, when depicting whom the pastor is. For Oden states,

This is the vocation of the pastor: to know the parish territory, its dangers, green meadows, its steep precipices, its season, and possibilities. The pastor leads the flock to spring water and safe vegetation. The flock recognizes their own good through the shepherd's voice. They do not see it in their interest to follow strangers. They know their own shepherd will not mislead them. The shepherd is able to anticipate their needs and is willing to deal with each one individually.¹⁰

⁸ Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, 70, 71.

⁹ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983), 50.

¹⁰ Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 52.

As it relates to the identity of the pastor, Oden's emphasis is different from Cahalan's, Fowler's, and Willimon's. Oden seems to emphasize the rich biblical metaphor of the caring, nurturing shepherd who feeds and protects the sheep. The context highly regards this metaphor as well. The senior pastor without doubt is the shepherd of the church. The church's challenge is organizing a team of approximately thirty-five ministers so that they might serve the context and the community effectively. What metaphor depicts their identity in the church? Are they a team of shepherds, disciples, or lead missionaries? Do they have specializations that might depict a different metaphor like care giver or healer?

Some denominations such as the United Methodist Church, acknowledge that the divine call and identity may lead ordained ministers to serve God 's people in places other than their congregations, in specialized settings, for example. *The Christian as Minister: An Exploration into the Meaning of God's Call*, explains that United Methodist ministers may serve as hospital, prison, industry, or military chaplains. In addition, pastoral counselors may serve on staffs of local churches, in pastoral counseling centers, in health care institutions, or private practice. What distinguishes these vocations from callings carried out in the local church is the nature of the institution and the role the clergy play in that arena.¹¹ The commission in the African Methodist Episcopal church that has promoted the inclusion of specialized ministries as a vital vocation is the African Methodist Episcopal Women in Ministry. One of their objectives is to affirm specialized ministries including but not limited to: chaplaincy, writing, teaching, counseling, research, prison, youth, geriatric, singles, street, health care, family/life relations, music,

¹¹ Meg Lassiat, ed., *The Christian as Minister: An Exploration into the Meaning of God's Call*, (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry The United Methodist Church, 2013), 47-50.

homeless, HIV/AIDS and religious education ministries.¹² In the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church) the call to preach and pastor are readily received as vocations appropriate for ordination whereas specialized ministries may received push back from episcopal leaders who wish to limit ordination to the aforementioned callings.

Martin Luther and John Calvin appear to have influenced the theology of vocation in the Protestant Church in the sense that all believers are called to participate in the general ministry of Christ. Fowler describes how Martin Luther in the sixteenth century reformed the identity of the church. Luther's theology of the priesthood of all believers closed the divide between the clergy and the laity, positing that each Christian had his or her work to perform as a part of the vocation of Christ. Ordination was not a special status before God but rather the delegation of responsibilities by the congregation to one who had gifts to organize and tend to the interest of the church. One's status was derived from baptism through Christ, that status being, a child of God.¹³ 1 Peter chapter two verse nine lends support to the theology of the priesthood of all believers stating that believers make up a royal priesthood. In the context both the clergy and the laity have the identity of a royal priesthood having a divine calling to participate in the liberating and reconciling work of Jesus Christ. It is not unusual to hear a layperson speak of his or her calling to teach church school, to work with teen mothers, or to serve on the finance committee. This doctrine empowers both the lay and clergy to fulfill the work that the Holy Spirit calls them to do. Secondly, believers have faith in the forgiveness of their sins

¹² Compilation Committee 2012, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, TN: The AMEC Sunday School Union, 2013), 445.

¹³ Fowler, *Mentoring into Vocation*, 88, 89.

through their own prayers; there is no need for a mediator. They can approach the throne of grace for themselves.

Fowler further points out that John Calvin adopted a social theology and theory of vocation. Seemingly, Calvin sought to impact social, political, and economic structures with the gospel and influence the church to oppose the sin and corruption of the world in order to usher in God's order. This was the particular calling of a person, his or her daily work, or occupation, with hopes that it would contribute to the right and godly order.¹⁴ Undoubtedly the context is called to make a difference in the community by extending the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ through both home and overseas mission projects.

The selected theologians seem to concur that in order for a person to know what the Holy Spirit is calling them to do, he or she will have to answer the question, "Who am I? In the early stages of my call, the identity question presented a momentous challenge. For a number of reasons seeing myself as a minister was a struggle. This struggle delayed full acceptance of the divine call.

Discerning The Call

Not only do individuals called to the ordained ministry confront questions of vocational identity, but also they seemed to have discerned this intuitive call of the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. William H. Myers, professor of New Testament and Black church studies at Ashland Theological Seminary has analyzed the call narratives of a cross-section of African American ministers from different denominations including both

¹⁴ Fowler, *Mentoring into Vocation*, 91,92.

genders. Myers seems to conclude that there are three elements that recurred in stories that not only influenced the ministers vocational choice but, also, helped to validate their call. An internal urge and sign often appearing in various combinations strongly validated the call. Those who felt that they were nurtured or groomed for the ministerial vocation, too, felt validation.¹⁵ Myers states,

A number of conclusions may be drawn about term 'urge' found in these narratives. The term encompasses a 'consciousness,' 'inclination,' 'awareness,' and 'desire' that ministry is to be one's vocational choice. It may manifest itself as feelings of 'restlessness,' 'dissatisfaction,' 'uneasiness,' and lack of fulfillment' with any other pursuit in life. It may be variously interpreted by the callee as his or her divine destiny, influenced partially or wholly through human channels. The human channels....such as being a PK....This urge is described by some as emerging suddenly, but by others as emerging gradually.¹⁶

Myers describes signs to include voices, referring to the perception of divine communication; visions, used synonymously for a dream or trance, and what he refers to as concomitant events meaning events in nature such as car accidents, bright lights from the sky, and hospital operations that may awaken a person to his or her call.¹⁷

Interestingly, a parallel may be drawn between the call of Moses in Exodus chapter three and the conclusions asserted by Myers. In the Moses story and the narratives analyzed both Moses and some ministers claim that a sign accompanied a divine call.

Furthermore, one of the textbooks used by the Board of Examiners of the Atlanta North Georgia Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to help persons discern their call to ordained ministry is called *Sorting it Out: Discerning God's Call to Ministry* authored by Alice R. Cullinan. Cullinan's book advises the admissions class (the

¹⁵ William H. Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder than My No: Rethinking the African-American Call to Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 24.

¹⁶ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder than My No*, 27.

¹⁷ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder than My No*, 28-33.

first class sponsored by the Board of Examiners preparing candidates for ministry) as it relates to discerning the call of God to ordained ministry. It explains the means by which persons may discern the voice of the Holy Spirit when seeking clarity concerning their call. Some persons may wonder whether or not their thoughts are from God or in what arena God may be calling them to serve—the church, the mission field, the hospital, the prison, the hospice center, or some other context.

First, Cullinan points out that God, the Holy Spirit may speak through the scriptures, so she encourages persons to read, study, and meditate upon the Bible daily. Second, God may speak through prayer; spend time not only speaking to God but, also, especially listening for the still small voice of the Holy Spirit to speak, guide and give direction for the future.

Third, God, the Holy Spirit may speak through circumstances such as open and closed doors of opportunity. Therefore, when a numbers of opportunities exist, the advice is to rely on prayer, scripture, and support of godly counsel to assist in discerning the will of God. Pray for peace as discerning takes place. Fourth piece of advice, God may speak through the circumstances of a person's own natural interests and abilities. Therefore, as individuals become more aware of their abilities, talents, and spiritual gifts, personal desires and aspirations, they may be more likely to discern the divine call. Fifth, God speaks through an individual's spiritual gifts, which are a manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the individual. Cullinan's advice to candidates is to ask God to reveal their spiritual gifts and how these relate to the Spirit's divine call. The sixth advice states that God also speaks through inner impressions, that still small voice within the heart. In trying to discern the voice of the Spirit pray for a sense of conviction where

by the impression is constant. Allow for a time of testing and an opportunity to seek wise counsel and ask God to grant peace in following the call discerned.¹⁸

Both Myers and Cullinan, point out the value of the inner call—the urge and the inner impression—respectively as the individual attempts to discern his or her vocation. In contrast seemingly, Cullinan discourages the use of signs such as dreams as elements of discernment whereas Myers records how in retrospect, ministers found that these signs helped to not only discern their call but, also, the signs gave the call validity.

In addition, discernment raises the issue of the inner call and the outer call. The inner call seemly concerns the inner urge, the inner impression, that intuitive still small voice of the Holy Spirit that calls the disciple into either the general ministry of the laity or the ordained ministry. The outer call appears to involve the church's role in enabling persons to discern their call, in addition to, authenticating, validating, and sending forth persons to fulfill the divine call. In the case of the call to ordained ministry, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has instituted a process that accompanies a candidate for ordained ministry from the beginning of the call to the final ordination as elder. Perhaps, on those occasions when persons do not complete the process, the board could remind them that they are still members of the body of Christ. Even though they no longer discern a call to ordained ministry, it is still important for them to discern what their divine call is.

Seemingly, Oden deems that candidates for ordained ministry may undertake a self-examination of their inner call or what he refers to as the inward call in order to test their claim by asking such questions as: How much am I willing to give up in order to

¹⁸ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder than My No*, 23-36.

serve the poor, the alienated, the sick? How deep is my emphatic capacity to feel another's hurt? Am I a person in whom the community of faith can place full trust? Then after asking such questions as these, seek the critical judgment of trusted individuals. If the response has been positive thus far, shift to the outward call. Oden seems to assert that the call to ministry requires not only a private, inward, intuitive feeling of a divine call but, also, the church has the obligation to outwardly confer the office of ministry.¹⁹

Oden explains,

The purpose of the outward or external call to ministry is to examine and confirm the preliminary intuition of an inward call by deliberately testing and assessing the candidate's potential for service to the body of Christ. The agent by which the external call is made is the visible church—that means fallible, ordinary people in the living body of Christ—through duly authorized pre-ordination procedures.

Oden makes a valid point. It is important that candidates for ordination understand that the call is intuitive; therefore, it should be examined and verified. It is all right if one discovers that the ordained ministry really is not the avenue where God is calling them to carry out their ministry.

The Board of Examiners of the African Methodist Episcopal Church fulfills the role of the outer call to test the inner call of the candidate authorizing and validating the candidate for ordained ministry. In addition, candidates must complete the master of divinity degree before the ordination date in order to receive itinerant elders' orders.

Conclusion

Both clergy and lay receive a divine call as a result of their baptism and their salvific relationship with Christ. Clergy have been called and gifted by the Holy Spirit

¹⁹ Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 19, 20.

and ordained by the church to give leadership to the body of Christ and the community. A person's identity seems to be integrally related to his or her calling; therefore, it is important to answer the question, 'Who am I?' when seeking to fulfill one's calling. The answer to the identity question may be as general as a disciple of Christ, that is, they are called to be followers of Christ, to carry out their mission, and do the work of Christ. Clergypersons are children of God; they belong to God and exist under the sovereignty and power of God. Or the answer may be as specific as an equipper of missionaries. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit grants spiritual gifts in order to enable clergy person to do their work. The answer to the identity question may help ministers seeking to fulfill their calling to ordained ministry.

That which distinguishes the clergy from the laity is the fact that clergy are set apart by the church, granted spiritual gifts to equip the people of God to be followers of Christ and to prepare them to carry out the mission and work of Christ. The church ordains clergy to give leadership to the body of Christ and the community. In addition, clergy not only carry out their calling in the church but, also, in other institutions such as hospitals, prisons, the military, and in seminaries. Important questions for clergy to consider are, "Does the nature of the institution fit what God is calling me to do and what God has gifted me to do?"

The intuitive nature of the call may raise doubts, insecurities, and anxieties. Clergypersons may ask, "Did I really hear the voice of God calling me into the ordained ministry?" They may discern the voice of the Holy Spirit by engaging in such spiritual disciplines as prayer, meditation, and Scripture reading. In choosing the call to ministry, ministers may be responding to an irresistible urge, or a divine sign. They even may have

been nurtured in the faith. Clergy seek validation from their pastor, family members, and the church.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETIAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Insight as it relates to the call to ministry is sought from a selected number of scholars from the field of education, business, psychology, and practical theology mindful of the problem in the project's context, Turner Chapel African Methodist Church in Marietta, Georgia. The problem is that there are clergy and licentiates who are struggling with insecurities, anxieties, and questions as it pertains to fulfilling their divine call. Herein, we attempt to examine the struggles and identify the approaches that may be utilized to help them fulfill their calling despite the struggles encountered.

Struggling to Fulfill the Call

Even though answering the divine call seems to give one's life meaning, purpose, and fulfillment, following the call to ordained ministry does not appear to exempt a person from struggle. Individuals attempting to fulfill their call probably possess doubts concerning whether or not they have clearly understood the intuitive voice of the Holy Spirit. They may have insecurities as it relates to whether or not they have the capacity—the gifts, talent, skills, and temperament, needed to faithfully serve in a ministerial vocation. In addition, they may not identify themselves in the same light as the

omniscience and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, who calls them to be ministers. Even the church may present a struggle for a ministerial candidate when the individual's perception of his or her call does not align with the tradition or polity of the ecclesiastical body. For example, some faith communities restrict ordination based upon gender and therefore, do not ordain women. Or if the women are ordained, opportunities of service may be limited. The struggle resulting from denying ordination based on gender seems unique to women's pursuit of the ministerial call.

William H. Myers, a New Testament scholar, in his comprehensive analysis of the call narratives of selected African American ministers seems to conclude that the struggle is quite evident in the retrospective narrative of ministers. He found that internal conflict, depicted as restlessness, unhappiness, and emptiness, accompanied the pursuit of this vocation.¹ He summarizes,

Women experience internal conflict because of their gender. PK's (preachers kids) experience conflict because of the way their fathers are treated economically, socially, and politically. Others experience conflict as they become aware of the lost freedom and restrictions that the vocation entails. This is especially the case if the callee is young. Each of these conflicts serves as the basis for the resistance of the call.²

Myers documents how some minister's internal struggle was due to ambiguity or doubt. They wondered whether or not a call had actually occurred and what did it mean? Some felt lonely and afraid as they struggled to understand the call. In addition, Myers describes how some ministers have experienced external conflict in their encounters with parents, spouses, in-laws, pastors, parishioners, and others who question the authenticity

¹ William H. Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder than My No* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 46.

² Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder than My No*, 46.

of the call. As a result of the conflict and struggle, individuals have attempted to resist the call by ignoring it, denying it, delaying it, or substituting another vocation for it.³

Some of the ministers at Turner Chapel, the context for this project, have articulated some of the internal and external struggles depicted above. In addition to these, many seem to struggle with fulfilling their ministerial vocation with the added burden of working in a secular occupation that provides economically for the family. Furthermore, some persons have difficulty completing the educational requirement for both the elder and deacon orders because of the financial strain on their personal budgets, the lack of financial assistance from the denomination, and the escalating cost of higher education. A bachelor's degree is required in order to receive deacon's orders and a master of divinity degree is required to attain elder's orders.

Approaches to Address the Struggle

Discovering ways to identify and address the struggles of ministers striving to fulfill their calling was an aim of this project. In order to effectively deal with this issue, it seems that those responsible for the ministerial development of ordained clergy such as episcopal leaders, presiding elders, senior pastors, examining boards, and local church ministerial development components could place addressing this issue as a high priority on their ministerial development agenda. For example, perhaps they could facilitate opportunities for licentiates (those licensed to preach and pursuing ordination, for example, in the African Methodist Episcopal Church) and ordained ministers, to wrestle with the identity question not only from a theological perspective but also a

³ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder than My No*, 45, 46.

psychological, and social perspective. Also if licentiates and ministers (here after referred to as ministers) would reflect upon their call narrative retrospectively and meditatively, noting their struggles, perhaps this could be beneficial. Furthermore, ministers could take the initiative and partner with mentors, coaches, and counselors who might help them address the concerns inhibiting the fulfillment of their calling. Lastly, some struggles seemingly are precipitated by external structures that block the ministers' pathway. Methods that reform structure such as strategic and collaborative efforts might be efficacious in removing the hindrances.

When attempting to fulfill his or her calling, Mark A. Fowler prescribes utilizing the service of a mentor. He describes the role of the mentor in partnership with a minister seeking to fulfill his or her calling. He states,

Mentors help identify gifts, elements of personality, understanding of the faith, necessary gifts, and the like that will form and identify vocational possibilities and directions. But a mentor must never believe that he or she is doing and forming. Nor can the mentor control what God, through the Holy Spirit, will do in the life of the mentee. Transformation is the gift and work of God. The mentor must offer the mentee courage and encouragement and help him or her articulate the definition of what God is doing.⁴

It seems that if mentors would function in this capacity then mentoring relationships would help inspire courage so that ministers may address the identity question, discern their gifts, discover what they are called to do and where they are called to serve. Recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in the growth and transformation of ministers would probably sustain the mentoring relationship and set realistic boundaries for the mentor.

⁴ Mark A. Fowler, *Mentoring into Vocation: Touchstones for the Journey* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry the United Methodist Church, 2006), 68.

Secondly, Fowler depicts how mentors and mentees represent friends in Christ; each has chosen the other in a spirit of humility that fosters the gifts of love bearing fruit that lasts. He appears to encourage mentors to utilize methodology from the secular sphere to enhance the effectiveness of ministers. For example, mentors may adopt coaching strategies to increase skills and to inspire and motivate or they could utilize the apprentice model, which has to do with passing on a craft from a “master” to a “novice.” Lastly, the mentor as supervisor, perhaps, would function similarly to a seminary field supervisor, that is, empowering mentees to discern their call.⁵

Furthermore, Fowler, speaks of the five “C”s of mentoring that when considered, perhaps, could enable ministers to deal with their inevitable struggles and help them fulfill their Christian vocation. The five “C”s are Call, Covenant, Context, Credo, and Connexion. It seems that each respectively involves the mentor partnering with the mentee in the following ways—facilitating understanding and clarification of issues that concern the mentee’s call; sanctioning the covenant not only with God but also with the one another; understanding the context wherein service is rendered; lifting up the credos or creeds of the faith; and appreciating the value of connection, that is, empowerment and accountability from colleagues in the broader church.

Women in ordained ministry confront a unique struggle in fulfilling their Christian calling. Ecclesiastical systems may bar them from fulfilling their Christian vocation, grant limited opportunities based upon a polity, or structure that restricts females yet includes males. Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang present a possible solution. They purport, “What is needed is greater attention to the need to change ecclesiastical

⁵ Myers, *God’s Yes Was Louder than My No*, 70-72.

systems. If denominational leaders are actively hostile or insensitive to finding the right ministry settings for women, female clergy get discouraged. When this happens, it is important to remember that these women are not failures rather, the system is failing them.”⁶ For a system, especially an ecclesiastical one to acknowledge failure would probably require a deep humility and sensitivity on the part of governing leadership.

Furthermore, Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang seem to challenge women in ministry to assume responsibility for their own emotional health by advising them to shift their focus and help facilitate systemic change. They assert, “Perhaps, when contemporary women shift their perspective from seeing their individual failings as the problem and recognize that institutional systems are still frustrating their careers, they will be able to help various denominational systems become more hospitable to women.”⁷

Peter Scazzero, offers a comprehensive perspective in his work, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* that describes how healthy spirituality does not happened without healthy emotions. Much of what he presents seems most beneficial for Christians striving for a healthy life. Two of his ideas may assist ministers struggling with fulfilling their calling. First is the notion of claiming one’s authentic self. Scazzero says,

Awareness of yourself and your relationship with God are intricately related. In fact, the challenge to shed our ‘old false’ self in order to live authentically in our ‘true self’ strikes at the very core of true spirituality. St. Paul the apostle, expressed this as, ‘to put off your old self’....and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Eph 4:22,24).⁸

⁶ Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 132.

⁷ Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, *Clergy Women*, 65.

⁸ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 65.

Perhaps, if ministers would lay claim to their true self as discerned through divine revelation of the Holy Spirit and be who God has called them to be, this may give them courage to live out their vocation in the face of opposition.

Secondly Scazzero points out that on the journey Christians will face trials, set back, and seasons termed the dark night of the soul or walls. He distinguishes the wall from the trials and setbacks of life. To encounter a wall on the journey is intensely painful. Christians feel like God has abandoned them since the classic Christian disciplines—prayer, Scripture meditation and the like seem ineffective. Scazzero explains that confronting walls occurs on the journey and going through them is required for an emotionally healthy spirituality. He elucidates the purpose of the wall:

This (the wall) is God's way of rewiring and 'purging our affections and passions' that we might delight in (God's) love and enter into a richer, fuller communion with (God). God wants to communicate to us (God's) true sweetness and love. (God) longs that we might know (God's) true peace and rest. (God) works to free us from unhealthy attachments and idolatries of the world. (God) longs for an intimate, passionate love relationship with us.⁹

Ministers faced with trials, setbacks, and walls on their journey may agree with Scazzero that these painful experiences are inevitably a part of their spiritual and emotional formation. The Holy Spirit may be pruning and purging them so that they may mature in the faith and bear good fruit. James 1: 2-4 encourages the reader to consider how trials and temptations work to mature the Christian. Regarding feeling of abandonment, Matthew 27:46 demonstrates that Jesus, too, felt abandoned by God as he hung on the cross to redeem humanity.

⁹ Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, *Clergy Women*, 123.

Affirmation In The Call

Seemingly, one of the ironies of the ministerial life is that in spite of the struggles as it relates to fulfilling the call, there are instances where one discovers affirmation when the call is validated as well as when one completes an assignment commissioned by the Holy Spirit and the church. This affirmation says, “Yes, our spirit bears witness to your spirit that you have heard the divine call.” Concerning divine validation, William Myers discovered that it is important for both men and women in overcoming the ambiguities and struggles that accompany the call. This validation may come from voices, visions, and other supernatural phenomena; or it may come as situational confirmations (all other desired avenues have closed doors). Myers further found that divine validation is in some sense more important for women since human validation may be less likely for women than for men.¹⁰

Myers further purports that human validation is equally as important as divine validation. He elucidates,

Irrespective of how immediate the divine validation is, both men and women continue to seek human validation. Most often some event correlated with the human validation is the turning point of a call. Although women may emphasize divine validation more often because of the dearth of human validation they receive, when women receive human validation it is highly emphasized, and its absence may often inflict lasting wounds.¹¹

In retrospect, the affirming words of mother who said, “You sound like a preacher” validated the inner call, the impression to enter the ordained ministry in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Also, along the journey there was one unexpected affirmation from a man who progressively moved from being one of the community’s

¹⁰ Myers, *God’s Yes Was Louder than My No*, 189.

¹¹ Myers, *God’s Yes Was Louder than My No*, 189.

marginalized alcoholics to becoming a beloved member of Turner Chapel. His affirmation was, Junior Pastor; this came at a time when personally the identification of minister and teacher was embraced, not pastor. During this same time the presiding elder called forth the gift and affirmation of pastor as well. He stated, “You know you are a pastor as well.” Most recently a four year old gave a humorous affirmation as she identified me as Reverend Church. When the Holy Spirit uses someone to say,

“Yes, you have heard the divine call, that person is probably affirmed in his or her spirit and therefore empowered to move another step further along the journey of fulfilling his or her call to ministry.

Secondly, when ministers manifest the fruits of ministry by impacting the lives of both individuals and community in a transformative and liberating way, this may be affirming. To have the Holy Spirit use a human vessel to transform a climate of pain and suffering, may not only be affirming but, also, rewarding and joy inspiring. To teach, preach, counsel, baptize, serve Communion, and witness how the Holy Spirit transforms the lives of people through these acts of ministry is probably most fulfilling for ministers.

A Glimpse at Calling: Selected Views in Education, Business and Psychology

Interestingly as the investigation of the meaning of calling continues across disciplines it seems that there are numerous ways of understanding this concept. Herein is a glimpse of the notions of selected scholars in the fields of education, business, and psychology.

Parker J. Palmer, a senior associate of the American Association for Higher Education, appears to have gradually arrived at his concept of calling after having lived a

life initially to please others, a life not considered his own. He shares insights that direct the reader to listen to the voice within to discover your calling. Palmer states, “Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live—but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.”¹² This view of vocation raises the question: How does a person listen to his or her life?

Seemingly, Palmer holds that by listening not only to words but also to intuition, instincts, feelings, and the state of the body, persons may receive guidance to lead authentic lives. The source seems to be internal rather than external, the human soul, which speaks its truth only under quiet, inviting, and trustworthy conditions.¹³ This raises the question who or what speaks to the human soul? According to Parker, it seems that the voice comes in birth. Perhaps there is no external voice like the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, Parker appears to say that life is a pilgrimage and after having journeyed along a road fraught with hardships, darkness, and peril most people arrive at a sense of self and vocation.¹⁴ If this is true then the struggles that most people dread and hope to avoid may actually enable them—ministers, for example, to understand their identity and their calling. In this light the struggles and the vicissitudes of life possess purpose and value. Concisely, Palmer points out, “The deepest vocational question is not

¹² Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 4.

¹³ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 6, 7.

¹⁴ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 17,18.

‘What ought I do with my life?’ It is the more elemental and demanding, ‘Who am I? What is my nature?’¹⁵ Knowing one’s identity appears to be integrally related to an understanding of one’s calling.

Turning attention to the field of business, scholars such as Jeffrey Van Duzer, dean of the business school at Seattle Pacific University, Michael Novak, philosopher, journalist, and diplomat, and Valerie L. Myers, president of Myers Management Consulting LLC, shed light on the notion of calling from a business perspective. Jeffrey Van Duzer seems to offer a different approach to doing business, and it has theological overtones. When asked the question why does business matter to God? Duzer responds,

Because business has a role to play in advancing God’s kingdom agenda, and it does so in two key ways. One, it helps provide meaningful and creative work for people to do, which is part of how people express their God-given identity. Two, it produces goods and services that enable communities to flourish. Economic capital is grown by business – and almost business alone – so all other institutions, in one fashion or another draw on the economic capital that business creates.¹⁶

Here Duzer articulates an extraordinary call for people working in the business arena. To say that business people have a role to play in advancing the kingdom agenda seems to represent a paradigm shift. Oftentimes, amassing profits and increasing shareholder value have been the primary goals of businesses but not in this approach. Duzer explains, “Profit is like blood in a body. If blood isn’t pumping through your body, we don’t have to talk about your purpose, because you’re dead. Similarly, if profit isn’t flowing through a business, we don’t have to talk about the business’ purpose, because

¹⁵ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 15.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Van Duzer, “Another way of doing business,” accessed June 17, 2014, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/multimedia/Jeffrey-van-duzzer-another-way-doing-business>.

it's bankrupt. Few of us get up in the morning and say, 'Today I'm going to live to circulate blood.' Blood is important, but it's not our purpose, and similarly for profit."¹⁷ Interestingly, this approach to business is based on a biblical model: creation-fall-redemption-new-creation. Duval's understanding of the purpose comes out of the creation narrative, the notion that God chose to provide for God's world partly through the work of human beings. The fall seems to represent a rejection of limits. Redemption appears to focus upon business doing that, which is restorative, repairing, and redeeming. The new creation seemingly refers to the notion that God in the new kingdom will in some mysterious way use the work done by us today. As it pertains to the view of the church, Duzer seems to believe that the church values businesspeople because they bring in money or some skill that the church needs. Duzer seems to want the church to offer a theological perspective as it relates to what businesspeople do in their arena.¹⁸

Secondly, Michael Novak describes four characteristic of a calling. A brief sketch is outlined below.

1. Each calling is unique to each individual. Not everyone wants to work in the same field.
2. A calling requires certain preconditions. It requires more than a desire; it requires talent. For a calling to be right it must fit a person's abilities and the person welcomes the struggle that accompanies the calling.
3. A true calling yields a sense of enjoyment and reward. This does not mean a person does not get weary and burdened down by the task involved in fulfilling the call.
4. A calling is not easily discovered. False starts are taken requiring experimentation, setbacks, discernment, false hopes, and patience before discovering the calling.¹⁹

¹⁷ Duzer, "Another way of doing business."

¹⁸ Duzer, "Another way of doing business."

Even though Novak speaks of calling mindful of a businessperson's call, reflection upon these characteristics may help facilitate ministerial formation. For example, recognition that setbacks may occur and that patience is a part of the discovery process could possibly ease some frustration.

In addition, Novak seems to believe that there is value in businesspeople seeing their work as a calling. To take this approach would give them a sense of being a part of a noble profession, raise their esteem about what they do, give them a greater sense of satisfaction, and help them see that they are co-creators involved in fulfilling the Creator's work. Novak appears to believe that business has a special role to bring hope to the poor.²⁰

Valerie L. Myers seems to emphasize the significance of transcendence and good works in her definition of calling. She states, "Calling is a transcendent and generative ethical system that seeks to produce 'good works'—ethical and increasingly excellent results. The beneficiaries of these results are individuals, organizations, and society. The source of the call is subjective and may be spiritual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal, social, or existential. Individuals and organizations can have a calling."²¹

Valerie Myers seems to deem that in order to maintain integrity and hold true to one's calling in business requires adept soul crafting. Soul crafting focuses on the inner being that relies on collective cosmologies or worldviews, which may be professional,

¹⁹ Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), 35.

²⁰ Duzer, "Another way of doing business."

²¹ Valerie L. Myers, *Conversations about Calling: Advancing Management Perspectives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 199.

cultural, familial, or religious. One's worldview helps to sculpt moral identity, gain perspective, find guidance and wisdom, solve problems, and acquire the resources to be and do one's best work. Soul crafting honors one's gifts and dignity and encourages caring for one's soul, empowering a person to change his or her situation rather than accept it.²²

As a result of their psychological research, Jennifer S. Feenstra, a social psychologist, and Amanda M. Brouwer share insights as it relates to identity and calling. Feenstra and Brouwer investigated the connection between identity development in a population of Christian college students and their understanding of vocation as well as the correlation between vocational understanding, and spiritual development and college adjustment.

Feenstra and Brouwer define vocation as it relates to their study. They state, "In the present study an understanding of vocation is defined as discovering one's identity, understanding the world, and discerning one's purpose in relation to God's will...This definition of vocation draws on a historical understanding of the word, going beyond vocation as a career to vocation as calling."²³ The results of this study are succinctly enumerated below.

- 1) Students who have explored and come to conclusions about their identity also have a greater understanding of their Christian vocation.
- 2) Students who are currently exploring their identity in relation to politics, religion, and philosophy of life, for example, are feeling less like they understand their vocation.

²² Duzer, "Another way of doing business," 45,47.

²³ Jennifer S. Feenstra and Amanda M. Brouwer, "Christian Vocation: Defining Relations with Identity Status, College Adjustment, and Spirituality," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (La Mirada, California: Rosemead School of Psychology, 2008), 83.

- 3) Students who do not know about their identity also lack understanding of Christian vocation.
- 4) Results indicate that as an understanding of vocation increased so did student's adaptation to college.
- 5) These correlations suggest that while understanding one's Christian vocation is positive for college adjustment, less positive adjustment is likely to be found in those who are confused about their vocation.
- 6) Results indicate that participants reporting greater spiritual meaning and vitality, greater spiritual understanding, and commitment to community, and greater sense of secure spiritual attachments are also reporting higher vocational understanding.
- 7) Results indicate that as preoccupation scores increase, indicating a preoccupation with fear and anxiety in one's relationship with God, an understanding of vocation decreases.²⁴

Conclusion

As result of this discourse, it was discovered that the personal struggle with the identity question possibly might have led to some of the insecurities, anxieties, and questions pertaining to fulfilling my call to ordained ministry. Selected practical theologians have pointed out the correlation between understanding one's identity in Christ and fulfilling the call to ordained ministry. Selected scholars in the area of education, business, and psychology seem to confirm the notion that knowing one's identity is vital if one is to fulfill his or her calling. For scholars in other disciplines, the source of the call may or may not be transcendent.

Several approaches may help ministers in the context fulfill their calling.

- 1) Be intentional concerning the importance of knowing one's identity in Christ, recognizing one's gifts, talents, abilities, and personality.

²⁴ Feenstra and Brouwer, "Christian Vocation: Defining Relations," 83.

- 2) Review one's spiritual autobiography noting not only the joys but, also, the painful events.
- 3) In retrospective be able to articulate and receive insight from one's call narrative.
- 4) Utilize the service of mentors, coaches, counselors, and colleagues to help facilitate growth.
- 5) Know the authentic self in Christ and live it.
- 6) Utilize the spiritual disciplines to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The objective of this project was to develop a model that will enable and empower clergy to carry out their divine calling, in other words, to do what God is directing them to do in Christian ministry. This model helped participants understand the identity of God as the one who has called them, their ministerial identity in terms of their spiritual gifts, passion, abilities, personality type, spiritual and past experiences and call narrative and the identity of the institutional church in which they serve. The goal of the project was to discover how to empower clergy who struggle with insecurities, anxieties, and questions pertaining to fulfilling their divine calling. Research seems to suggest that an understanding of identity-who you are, what are your spiritual gifts, and where are you to serve, and an understanding of who God is-are integral to a clergy person fulfilling his or her calling as a minister. Hence the hypothesis: if the clergy person understands divine, ministerial, and institutional identity then they can become empowered and enabled to fulfill their divine call to ordained ministry.

Methodology

The people involved in the project were a selected group of thirteen clergy and licentiates (persons licensed to preach and minister in the church but not yet ordained).

The senior pastor approved the selected persons to participate in this project. A group of six was individually interviewed so that they could reflect upon their call narrative in retrospect. The selected group of thirteen participated in the teaching model, which included two Bible study classes grounded in the Old Testament and New Testament foundational text, centering upon the identity of God and the identity of the clergy person. The third class emphasized the meaning of calling, the identity of the minister, and the institutional church, and the final class was designed to affirm and identify ministerial identity through the lens of their spiritual gifts, passion, abilities, and insight from their spiritual and past experiences. Following each class the participants completed a pre and post questionnaire. Lastly, the group took part in a focus group discussion evolving around the hypothesis. Succinctly, data to test the hypothesis was gathered from the pre and post questionnaires, the one on one interview, and the focus group discussion, utilizing the qualitative method.

The professional associates served in an advisory capacity. The context associate participated in the study by contributing in the following ways:

- 1) Located an appropriated room for the research to take place.
- 2) Scheduled and sets up the room.
- 3) Distributed and secured consent forms from each participant.
- 4) Helped to develop the questions for the classes, the interview, and the focus group discussion.
- 5) Organized the information gathered from the questionnaires and recorded the results.
- 6) Recorded the focus group class and gathered results for the recording.
- 7) Transcribed, organized, and recorded the results of the interview.

- 8) Took notes throughout the process in order to assist in developing a model that will empower and enable clergypersons to fulfill their call to ordained ministry.

Pre and Post Class Questions were asked during the Old Testament class based on

Exodus 3:1-15 “Who is God and What does God’s I.D. have to do with my Calling?”

- How would you describe who Moses was in the beginning of the Exodus story before God called him to deliver the Israelites from slavery?
- How would you describe who Moses was when God called him to deliver the Israelites from slavery?
- How would you describe who the God of Moses was in the story of Moses’ commission?
- Why did Moses struggle and resist accepting God’s call for him to deliver the Israelites from slavery?
- Why might you struggle and resist fulfilling your calling to be an ordained minister?
- How might knowing who God is and who you are in relation to God enable and empower you to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister despite the struggles?

Pre and Post Class Questions asked during the New Testament Class based on

John 21:15-19, “Sent Forth Restored Despite the Struggle.”

- According to the gospel of John, how would you describe who Jesus was as the Good Shepherd?
- What did Jesus’ act of washing the feet of his disciples say about who Jesus was?
- Jesus fed his disciples while on the beach. What does this act say about who Jesus was?
- What characteristics of Jesus can we apply to our ministerial identity?
- Why did Peter deny being one of Jesus’ disciples?
- How did Jesus restore Peter?

- How was Peter to demonstrate his love for Jesus?
- Jesus commissions Peter to feed his sheep. What does the metaphor “feed my sheep” mean?
- What hope does Peter’s restoration give to you as a minister who may sometime struggle with failure?

Pre and post questions asked during the third class: “The Call, the Church, and the Minister.”

- How would you define, call, calling, call to preach; call to ordained ministry, call to ministry, and the call story?
- How do you discern the voice of the Holy Spirit calling you to enter the ordained ministry?
- Who are you as a minister and what distinguishes you from the laity?
- What role does the church play in the ordination process and in helping you to fulfill your calling?
- What are your struggles, fears, anxieties, and frustrations as it pertains to fulfilling your call to the ordained ministry?
- Where do clergy fulfill their calling as ordained ministry?
- Does the nature of the institution (church, prison, hospital, etc.) fit what God has called you to do and what God has gifted you to do?

Pre and post questions asked during the fourth class: “Who am I Through the Lens of S.H.A.P.E.”

- What are your spiritual gifts?
- What causes and issues are you passionate about and would love to address, and what people would you love to serve?
- What natural abilities or skills can you use in your ministry?
- Who are you in terms of your personality?
- How have your past experiences helped to equip you to carry out your ministry?

- Looking at yourself in light of the above responses, how might God use you as an ordained ministry?

Questions asked during the one-on-one interview: “Reflect and describe your call narrative.”

- What is God calling you to do as an ordained minister?
- What insights have you gained from a retrospective view of your calling?
- What are the struggles, anxieties, and questions that you face when attempting to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister?
- How does knowing who God is help you fulfill your calling?
- How does knowing the role and nature of the church help you fulfill your calling?
- How does knowing who you are help you to fulfill your calling?
- What else would you like to share during this interview?

Questions asked during the focus group discussion.

- What are some of your struggles, anxieties, insecurities and questions as it pertains to fulfilling your calling as an ordained minister?
- Who is God and how does knowing who God is empower you to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister?
- Who are you and how does knowing who you are and your ministerial role empower you to fulfill your calling to ordained ministry?
- Who is the church and how does knowing who the church is and its role empower you to fulfill your calling to ordained ministry?
- What do you think or feel you need to be empowered to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister?
- How does the three-fold identity of knowing God, yourself and the church empower you to fulfill your calling as an ordained?

In summary, the method utilized to test the hypothesis is as follows:

- Created pre and post questions to be completed before and after each class.
- Designed and facilitated two Bible studies whose aim was to help the participants understand the identity of God; their identity as clergy; and the identity of the church.
- Designed and facilitated a class whose aim was to help participants understand the meaning of calling, their ministerial identity and the nature of the church.
- Designed and facilitated a class whose aim was to affirm and confirm ministerial identity from the perspective of understanding spiritual gifts, passions of ministry, natural abilities, personality type, and reflection upon spiritual and past experiences.
- Analyzed the data and gather results from the three components – the teaching model, the one on one interview, and the semi-structured focus group discussion.

Project Calendar

- February 3, 2015 – Met with professional associates for consultation on the overall project and the structure of the research model.
- February 16, 2015 – Meet with context associates to review the overall structure of the research project, to discuss the aims of each component, that is, the classes, the interviews, and the focus group discussion. Organized, discussed, and delegated, responsibility, received critique.
- February 19, 2015 – Designed the lesson plans and questionnaire for Old Testament class based on Exodus 3:1-15-, “Who is God and What does God’s I.D. have to do with my Calling.”
- February 24, 2015 – Distributed the pre and post questionnaire and facilitated the Old Testament class.
- February 26, 2015 – Designed the questionnaire and the lesson plans for the New Testament class based on John 21:15-, “Restored Despite the Struggle.”
- March 3, 2015 – Distributed the pre and post questionnaire and facilitated the New Testament class.

- March 6, 2015 – Designed the questionnaire and the lesson plans for the class, “The Call, the Church, and the Minister.”
- March 10, 2015 – Distributed the pre and post questionnaire and facilitated the class, “The Call, the Church, and the Minister.”
- March 11, 2015 – Designed the questionnaire and the lesson plans for the class, “Who am I Through the Lens of SHAPE.
- March 12, 2015 – Distributed pre and post questionnaire and facilitated the lesson plans for the class, “Who am I Through the Lens of SHAPE?”
- March 25, 2015 – Met with the context associates to review the plan for the one on one interviews.
- March 26, 2015 - Met with the focus group in a semi-structured interview discussing questions revolving around the problem and the hypothesis.
- April 8, 9,13, 2015 – Conducted the one on one interviews.
- July 2015 – Worked with the context associate to analyze the data, compile results, and drawn what appears to be conclusions.

Implementation

Turner Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marietta Georgia, the context for this project, has experienced phenomenal growth over the past two decades. Coupled with the growth of the congregation has also been an increase in the number of persons who have acknowledged the call to ordained ministry and who have pursued and have completed ordination or are participating in the process of ordination. For the most part, these persons are carrying out their calling while serving the church and the community. What seems apparent is the notion that these clergypersons struggle with insecurities, anxieties, and questions pertaining to fulfilling their calling as ordained

ministers. This being the case the church wants to empower these clergypersons who oftentimes serve in a leadership capacity.

This project's defining problem was to discover how to empower clergypersons who struggle with these insecurities, anxieties, and questions as it relates to them fulfilling their divine calling. To clarify, empower is generally defined as to enable clergy to carry out their divine call as ordained persons. The objective of this project is not to eliminate the struggles and challenges that clergypersons confront but rather to design a model that will empower them to carry out their calling despite the vicissitudes of life and ministry.

Throughout the life of the church and the various environs where clergypersons live and attempt to fulfill their calling, there seems to be evidence of the various struggles that they encounter. For example, the call to ordained ministry seems daunting, mysterious, and awesome. The assignment appears to be beyond the capacity of the persons; therefore, some clergy may feel inadequate. Episcopal leaders sometimes question the relevancy of the call to ordained ministry if the calling is to specialized ministries such as teaching, youth, music, pastoral care, and counseling ministry. In this context, the need for a team of clergy serving in specialized areas is vital, yet some may feel what they do is irrelevant since they do not function as the senior pastor. In addition, there seems to be a disconnect between what the institutional church is calling the clergy person to do and what the person discerns he or she is called to do. Also, clergy have difficulty completing the educational requirements for the elder and deacon orders sometimes because of the financial strain on their personal budgets, the lack of financial assistance from the denomination, and the escalating cost of higher education.

Furthermore, there is a growing concern among the Episcopal leaders that the local elder is a threat to the church. Several clergy serving in this context are local elders. Lastly, family members, friends, spouses, members of the church and other significant relationships sometime question the authenticity of the clergy person's divine call. With the added burden of working a secular job in order to provide economically for the family, clergy struggle to fulfill their ministerial vocation. (Here vocation, call, and calling have the same meaning referring to the intuitive notion that God, the Holy Spirit has summoned or commissioned a person to carry out an act or acts of service as one ordained by the Christian Church.)

The hypothesis driving this project is this: if the clergypersons understand divine, ministerial, and institutional identity then they can become empowered to fulfill their divine call. In other words, if they understand who God is, who they are in light of their call to ordained ministry, and if they understand the institutional church then they will be able to carry out their divine call despite the vicissitudes of life and the inevitability of struggles such as insecurities, anxieties, and questions that accompany the journey on the road to fulfilling their divine call.

From a group of approximately thirty-five active clergypersons affiliated with the context, thirteen were selected to form a focus group. The senior pastor placed his stamp of approval upon the group. It was comprised of the executive, youth, and worship pastors. In addition to leaders of evangelism (husband and wife team leaders), discipleship, membership, Bible study coordination, and others who provide ministerial support in areas such as youth and women's ministry.

Noteworthy, the contribution of the context associates and the professional associates was valuable in helping to complete the project. The context associates assisted in organizing the class sessions, shared insight as it relates to the model, conducted the interviews, and analyzed the data. The professional associates offered overall consultation. They created the format for the consent forms and the pre and post questionnaires, helped to structure the research project, and gave guidance as it relates to the qualitative research method. Data was gathered from three areas-the pre and post questionnaires, the focus group, and the interviews.

The Model

The components of the model included four-class sessions whose title, lesson aims, and data results are outlined below.

Class I Title: “Who is God and What does God’s I.D. Have to do with my Calling?”

Old Testament Text: Exodus 3:1-15

Lesson Aims:

- To help participants understand God’s identity from the perspective of the text.
- To give participants the opportunity to articulate who God is from their perspective in light of the text.
- To discuss why Moses struggled and resisted accepting the commission and relate this to why participants struggle and resist fulfilling their calling from God.
- To discuss who Moses is from the perspective of both background text and primary text.

- To discuss the possibility that knowing who God is could help the participants struggle with less resistance and enable and empower them to fulfill their calling as ordained ministers.

The results of the Pre-Class Questionnaire:

- God is omnipotent, all knowing, caring, reassuring and forgiving.
- Moses felt inadequate and insecure to lead God's people.
- The participants, like Moses know their struggles and feel insecure and inadequate.
- Knowing who God is and having a relationship with God allows the participants to trust God, seek God for guidance and direction; having the reassurance that He will never leave you nor forsake you.

The results of the Post-Class Questionnaire:

- God is a deliverer. God is a listener; God listened to the heart of Moses. God is infinite. God is omniscience; God met Moses where he was and addressed his concerns.
- Knowing God, is understanding that God is always with us and God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.
- In the text, God was forgiving, assuring, one who would equip Moses for the task ahead; One that would be with him in his task.
- Knowing who God is means a lot; having a deeper understanding of all that God is, brings a clearer focus on the call to ministry.

The following conclusions seem to arise out of a comparison of the pre and post results of the questionnaires from the class session on Exodus 3:1-15.

- Participants possess a personal, heartfelt understanding of who God is.
- Participants were able to grasp insights as a result of viewing God from the perspective of the selected Old Testament text.
- Participants seem to be able to relate their struggles to Moses' struggles.
- Participants appear to be empowered by knowing who God is. They find assurance in knowing that God will never leave them nor forsaken them.

Class II Title: “Sent Forth Restored Despite the Struggle”

New Testament Text: John 21:15-19

Lesson Aims:

- To discuss Peter’s struggles to follow Jesus.
- To recognize that Jesus’ love restores Peter.
- To understand what assurance Jesus gave Peter.
- To discuss the identity of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and as the one who restores.
- To unpack the metaphor of the Good Shepherd and discuss the implications for the minister as the under-Shepherd (the shepherd who follows Jesus).
- To identify the sheep and understand the meaning of the metaphor, “feed my sheep.”
- To emphasize with the assurance that Jesus gave Peter and to receive that assurance as ministers.

The results of the Pre-Class Questionnaire:

- The metaphor “feed my sheep” means meeting the holistic needs of God’s people. Providing for their spiritual, physical, emotional etc. needs.
- The characteristics of Jesus that we can apply to our ministerial identity are: loving unconditionally, serving others; not being a respecter of person, forgiving unconditionally, humility, compassionate, passionate, loving, kind, restorer, leader, hospitable... etc. The act of washing the disciple’s feet showed humility and servant hood.
- Jesus restored Peter by showing him love and forgiveness.
- Jesus can be described as the Good Shepherd by the way he cared for all the needs of all the people. He was concerned about the least of these and every detail that concerned them.
- The reassurance that Jesus gave to Peter is available to us by understanding that God will forgive us for our transgressions and will use us to perform many miracles for the Kingdom of God.

The results of the Post-Class Questionnaire:

- The metaphor “feed my sheep” means to care, provide, and protect the sheep.
- The characteristics of Jesus that we must apply to our ministerial identity are concerns for people, showing compassion, love, and understanding, showing humility and providing for the needs of others.
- Jesus restored Peter by forgiving him and giving him a charge to feed his sheep. Jesus entrusted Peter with more responsibility that was near and dear to his heart.
- According to the gospel of John, Jesus can be described as the Good Shepherd because of the following characteristics: caring, selflessness, all knowing (omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient) not just a shepherd, he put his sheep before him, laid down his life for the sheep (protector, sacrifices), inclusive the sheep (no respecter of person)
- Peter’s restoration gives me faith and confidence in God’s love for me.

The following conclusions appear to emerge out of a comparison of the results of the pre and post questionnaires based on the New Testament text.

- Participants seem to be able to explore the characteristics of who Jesus was in this New Testament text and apply these to their ministerial identity. For example, the metaphors of Jesus as the “Good Shepherd” and as the one who “feeds the sheep” portray the servant who loves, nurtures, and cares for the sheep.
- Participants explored Peter’s denial of Jesus and seem to conclude the Jesus’ forgiveness and love restored him.
- Like Peter, the participants seem to believe that they too can be restored by the love and compassion of Jesus. This notion appears to empower them with faith and confidence in God’s love for them.

Class III Title: “The Call, the Church, and the Minister

Lesson Aims:

- To point out the diverse meaning of the word call, calling, and vocation.
- To discuss how to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit that calls a person to enter the ordained ministry.

- To understand the identity of the clergy person and what distinguishes him or her from the laity.
- To understand the role that the church plays in the ordination process and identify how the church helps the participant fulfill his or her calling.
- To give the participants an opportunity to share their struggles, fears, anxieties, and frustrations as it pertains to fulfilling their call to ordained ministry?
- To point out that clergypersons carry out their calling in other institutions than the church.
- To help participants determine whether or not the nature of the institution (church, prison, hospital, etc.) fit what God has called them to do and what God has gifted them to do.

The results of the Pre-Class Questionnaire:

- Some definitions of the call, calling, call to preach; call to ordained ministry, call to ministry, and the call story are listed below:
 - A divine appointment from God. One in which God has set you aside to be a part of the five-fold ministry. Also, in this calling, you are expected to feed the sheep and lambs as well as make disciples of them.
 - Call to preach is being able to share the word of God with others.
 - God moving a person from their place of comfort to His place.
- Discussion on how to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit that calls a person to enter the ordained ministry:
 - There is an unction; a deep awareness.
 - The Holy Spirit ministered in a dream.
 - Through meditation, prayer, reading of scripture and relationship with God to recognize the Holy Spirit's voice speaking from Spirit to Spirit.
 - Interrogated the voice through specially crafted questions.
 - Discerning the voice through prayer, scripture and meditation.

- The participants understand the identity of the clergy person and what distinguishes him or her from the laity is the affirmation of the church through the ordination process.
- Listed below are some struggles, fears, anxieties and frustrations as it pertains to fulfilling their call to ordained ministry:
 - Fear of not being good enough or right enough to preach the gospel.
 - Wanting to do what the “church” requires more than doing what God has called one to do – this causes fear and anxiety.
 - Fear; being out of God’s will and the sense of incompetence.
 - Fear of not living up to the magnitude of the calling that God has given me.
- The participants have determined that the nature of this institution called the church has helped them fit what God has called them to do and what God has gifted them to do. They are able to exercise their gifts within the AME structure.

The results of the Post-Class Questionnaire:

- Some definitions of the call, calling, call to preach; call to ordained ministry, call to ministry, and the call story are listed below:
 - Call – Invitation from God; a beckoning from God to ministry. Calling — what one does in ministry. An invitation from God; beckoning from God to an individual to come into the preaching ministry. An individual’s response to God’s leading into the ordination training process. Call to Ministry—an individual response to God’s invitation. Call Story—an individual “story” of what took place due to the specific event when they heard the Lord calling them to preach the Gospel and their response.
- Discussion on how to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit that calls a person to enter the ordained ministry:
 - Their relationship with God allowed them to know the voice and unction of the Holy Spirit calling—along with dreams—(as Joseph did) being validated by pastor—working in ministry.
- The participants understand the identity of the clergy person and what distinguishes him or her from the laity is the affirmation of the church through the ordination process.

- Listed below are some struggles, fears, anxieties and frustrations as it pertains to fulfilling their call to ordained ministry:
 - Fear, inadequacies, work life balance; changing nature of God's will.
- The participants have determined that the nature of this institution called the church has helped them fit what God has called them to do and what God has gifted them to do. They are able to exercise their gifts within the AME structure.

Conclusions drawn from a comparison of the results from the pre and post questionnaires completed by the participants attending the class, "The Call, the Church, and the Minister" are as follows:

- Participants seem to understand the semantic difference between call, calling, call to ministry, and the call story. Whether they understood the nature of the call to preach in reference to specialized ministry and the call narrative can be investigated in a subsequent class.
- Participants appear to hold that their relationship with God played a vital role in discerning their call as well as signs such as dreams, working in ministry, and the pastor's validation.
- Participants seem to hold that it is the affirmation of the church through the ordination process that distinguishes them from the laity.
- Participants seem willing to share the struggles that they encounter as ordained ministers. Some include fear, feelings of inadequacy, balancing work life with ministry, and the changing nature of God's will—for example, the executive pastor, after having served in the church for over 10 years may be called by God to serve as the senior pastor of a church.
- Participants seem convinced that the church, more specifically, Turner Chapel has helped them fulfill their calling and exercise their gifts.

Class IV Title: “Who am I Through the Lens of S.H.A.P.E?”

Lesson Aims:

- To identify and affirm the participants’ spiritual gifts.
- To identify the causes and issues about which the participant is passionate and would love to address, in addition to, the people that he or she would love to serve.
- To identify the natural abilities and skills that the participant can use in ministry?
- To identify the participant in terms of his or her personality.
- To give the participants the opportunity to acknowledge how their past experiences help to equip them to fulfill their ministry.
- Looking at themselves in light of the above responses, the participants will discuss how God might use them as ordained ministers.

The results of the Pre and Post Course (class) Questionnaire:

- All the participants knew their spiritual gifts. The common gift among the participants was teaching.
- All the participants were able to identify the causes and issues of their passionate areas. The passionate areas are listed below:
 - Lonely and hurting people
 - Social justice—equality and inequality
 - Women related—married, divorces, single or engaged.
 - Encouraging people
- All the participants knew their natural skills and abilities. They are listed below:
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Listening skills
 - Teaching abilities

- Facilitating
- Lead, administrate
- All the participants knew his or her personality type. The majority of the group considered themselves a combination introverts and extrovert depending on the situation.
- All the participants acknowledged their past experiences as a means of God equipping them to carry out their ministry. Some of the past experiences are:
 - The feeling of being an outcast
 - Relating to the hurting and the suffering
 - Persons in life-changing experiences
 - Experience in marriage, raising children and ministry
- All the participants are aware of how God might use them as ordained ministers. Some areas are listed below:
 - Being able to share God's word with authority
 - A teacher and an encourager
 - To empower God's people
 - At the intersection of where faith and health meet, in the (community) where justice and injustice meet in society and where prophetic and priestly roles intersects (in the church)
 - To preach and teach God's word
 - Edification and up building of the Kingdom

From the pre and post questionnaire on the class designed to help the participants reflect upon their ministerial identity the conclusions are as follows.

- The participants seem to be aware of their spiritual gifts, areas and people of which they are passionate and would love to serve, aware of their natural skills and abilities, in tune to their personality type, view their past experiences as a means by which God has equipped them to fulfill their calling.

- In that the participants possess a healthy awareness of their ministerial identity, it appears that this has helped them know how God might utilize them as ordained ministers. That said, this awareness seems to empower them to fulfill their calling.

The Interviews

The interviews afforded six research participants the opportunity to talk and reflect upon their calling. They shared with the interviewer their call narrative, their struggles in ministry, as well as how an understanding of God's identity, their ministerial identity, and the identity of the church might empower them to fulfill their divine call. From a transcript of each interview, an analysis was done. The results of this analysis is as follows.

Reflect and describe your call narrative. The participants understood there was a call on their lives. However there were struggles in getting confirmation and accepting the call. Some of the struggles and anxieties were:

- Determining to choose the AME church versus Episcopalian because of the family upbringing.
- Choosing marriage over God because of her husband's desire not to be married to a preacher.
- Wrestling all night with the idea that God wanted to take you higher in God and you wanting to stay in your comfort zone.
- Asking God for confirmation or in the words of the preacher, asking God to prove it to him by showing him three signs.
- After receiving the call, this participant wanted to know from God the specifics on the instructions God had given.

What is God calling you to do as an ordained minister? The participants were called as an ordained minister to do the following:

- To pastor God's people
- To educate God's people
- To teach followers about evangelizing
- To equip God's People
- To preach to God's people
- To bridge the gap for God's people

What insights have you gained from a retrospective view of your calling?

- God can use you no matter what state you are in.
- I am operating in God's will for my life
- I have matured spiritually through the studies at Bible Institute and the Master of Divinity program.
- With God all things are possible.
- My call is not tied to the traditions of my denomination.
- My goal is to make sure people accept their calling.

What are the struggles, anxieties, and questions that you face when attempting to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister?

- Being single and not having a spouse to share my ministry with.
- After twelve years at Turner, I am asking the Lord what is next.
- Learning how to adjust to being a wife, a mother, being employed and doing ministry.

- Balancing work within the world versus the work of the church; knowing when to put down the world's work and pick up the mantle of ministry.
- Am I good enough?
- The call of preacher, prophet and teacher is like a three-fold cord. There are places in Christendom where that three-fold cord does not get a welcome mat.

How does knowing who God is help you fulfill your calling?

- My calling is to educate/teach and I am a kinesthetic learner. God is the master teacher and God had different tactics, strategies and God used kindness and gentleness when God dealt with individuals. God met individuals where they were and dealt with their learning abilities. Knowing that about God has helped me to fulfill my calling in the area of education.
- Knowing who God is helps me fulfill my calling in that it is wanting to preach about God. It is another thing that Paul would say that I might know God. Every time I stand to talk about God, I stand to talk about the God that I know for myself. A God who has been there as a provider. God who has been there as a healer. God who has been there as a protector. So, knowing that and experiencing that first hand allows me to reach out and minister to God's people.
- Knowing that God is my I Am just helps tremendously in fulfilling my calling because I know that God will never leave me nor forsake me. I know that wherever my feet will tread, just like Joshua, God will be with me. God tells me do not be afraid. I know that God is my rock and God is my fortress.
- Knowing who God is has enabled me to do great exploits. Knowing that the creator of every good and perfect gift is at my beckon call by way of His Holy Spirit, by way of His power and His word. It has allowed me to invoke His presence in situations that only He can get results.
- Knowing who God is the totality. Because of my relationship with God that is what keeps me focused when my earthly contacts, my earthly experiences shake my core, it is getting back in God's face and God reminding me that you did not choose Me, I chose you. I ordained you to go forth and bring forth fruit, fruit that should remain.
- For me, I think out of all... we have what we called the Omni-three; the Omni-presence this is when we are dealing with the kids. We call them the Omni-three: Omniscient, Omni-presence and Omnipotent. I think for me to answer that question it is primarily looking at God as omnipotent, recognizing

that all power is in God's hand. So, as it relates to ministry for me, I always will reflect back to no matter what I am going through, no matter what is happening, what I do know is that God is all-powerful.

How does knowing the role and nature of the church help you fulfill your calling?

- That sometimes can become a little difficult and especially when you have the discipline saying one thing and in Turner we do another. I like the way Turner does. So the role, my role as an ordained minister, as a servant, as knowing my gifts has helped me to be able to be ... and I have to go back to the uniqueness of teaching when I need to teach, serving when I need to serve, ministering outside the four walls because Turner allows us to do that, and then being able to fulfill the calling.
- I believe when we say the church, we are talking specifically about the African Methodist Episcopal church. It helps me because unlike other people, I have experience the church at different levels. I experienced the church connectionally. I experienced the church through the annual conference, through the district conference and quarterly conference. At every level of the church, I have learned to love it and appreciate what the church is. Because what I realize is the church is a spiritual body and people get blessed but the church is also a working body. Within that working body there is business and politics that have to take place.
- It is a good thing to know that we are, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, we have a governing body which gives us structure. That is very, very important, the whole structure of the Board of Examination process, I like it. I grew up Baptist but in the Baptist church, not to degrade them in any way, I really did not know the history of Baptist, whereas when I came to the AME church I learned the history about Richard Allen and just the start of the AME church and I think that has been just so beneficial.
- Oh, it is wonderful for me, the BOE process, the teaching process, the senior preachers, like your self, our Pastoral team to learn the AME way. I am grateful to be in a setting where there are expectations and the teaching aspect of it. I have loved every minute and so I grateful for the structure. I am grateful for the expectations. I am grateful that there are people that I can go to say, well I have read this or I understood this, what does this ... how should I model this, you know, what should it look like. So I am ecstatic.
- You know, I appreciate the structure as it relates to some of the... you know it did help me as it relates to education and making sure or understanding the importance of education. However, when it all boils down to it, I just believe

that it is more about God than it is the structure and I could function no matter what denomination or organizational church structure I'm in.

How does knowing who you are help you to fulfill your calling?

- Knowing and accepting who God has made me, helps me to fulfill that calling.
- Oh, yes that is critical. You know, I get up in the morning and I look at S and sometimes, I shout and praise God and sometimes I am upset and angry. But at my age and where I am now in life and in ministry, I understand that like I said before, who I am and what God has called me to do and what God has made me to be and I praise God for that.
- God put it in me at birth and that call to teach just helps me be who God has called me to be and it helps me fulfill my purpose in life. The second call of the evangelist also just knowing that God is there for me, knowing that God has clearly spoken to me and not only to me, to different pastors, different leaders, different family members that I have had, even when I did not tell them that I was called to be an evangelist, they were speaking it, just helps me to know that is where God wants me to be and I am fulfilled with it because that is what God has called me to be, an evangelist and then a minister.
- Knowing who I am has made a difference. Knowing my limits, my boundaries, knowing how far I can go has made a difference. Knowing that I must depend and lean not to my own understanding but in all thy ways acknowledge the Lord to accomplish those things God has called me to do has made a difference in knowing myself.
- It is a process in every arena I come in reminding myself that irrespective of how everybody is, it's like a field of flowers - God was the cause of them all but they are all different, be true to who I am. So, my desire every day is to bring C under the Lordship of Christ that Christ might work in me that which is well pleasing. My life verse and I was pondering it on my way over it is Philippians 1:6 and it says..” being confident of this very thing, God who has begun a good work in me shall perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” and so I am open every day. I am asking God, something my pastor back home said to me years ago and I did not understand at the time, He says but our theology must always be under construction. As we are looking at God's word He will take a truth and broaden it and deepen it. So, every day as I go into God's word in my own time I ask Him to broaden, you know, keep me opened to what you are saying so that I might have a better application and I know for sure that my private relationship with God in terms of my devotion and

commitment and prayer life is the determiner of what my public ministry. If nothing is happening in my closet then nothing is happening out there of any significant for the kingdom.

- I think you almost ... for me, you have to be self-reflective. I think it is almost impossible to know your calling without knowing who you are. I think that's what makes ministry difficult when you do not recognize who you are.

What else would you like to share during this interview?

- I started one place, never thought I would be in Atlanta, never thought I would be in a quote mega church, never thought that I would be in a church where you could be so free to be who God has called you to be. I thank God for the listening ear because I have come to a place of wealth by being here.
- I like to share that for me I am at a place in my life where in I'm asking God what's next for me. God has not revealed that yet, but I'm trying to get as close to The Lord as I can. Like I said in one of our last sessions I believe, the closer you get to God, the closer you get to God, who is the light. The more the light shines on you the more you see yourself for who you are and the more you see yourself, the more you are able to empower yourself, to empower other people. Every day I'm trying to get to as close as I am to God for God to reveal more to me so I can do what God has called me to do the next twenty-five years left for me to do ministry before I retire.
- I just want to say that it has been a very good process being in the classes with Reverend Cassandra. It has made me reflect back on the different models or lessons that we have gone over and it's been very educational and very informative and I thank Reverend Cassandra Young Marcus so much for just including me in the process.
- I just would like to share that at times as a reverend, one called to the gospel, we sometimes become weary, but the Bible tells in weariness and well doing that we should always just depend upon the Lord. We have a great responsibility, I do, in sharing God's gospel and for so often I've seen others take it likely and I've seen individuals pass on from this life not knowing the Lord and it's heartbreaking to be amongst family members and those friends who have to take on that heartache. So my goal, my vision, is to share the gospel with those who need to share it their love ones or to encourage them to share it with their family members, friends before it's too late.
- I think I did. Just that I am grateful for this season. I am grateful as I look to our last BOE class on Saturday as I look towards the examinations at the end of the month, the 24th and 25th. It is ... I am in a shift and I do not know what is coming next in terms of what God has but I just am open. The other verse that God has kind of put with that is II Corinthians 2:9-10 where it says eyes

have not seen ears have not heard and it has not entered into my heart all that God has but it is revealed by God's spirit. So, I want to be open. I want to be opened to the leading of the Lord. Being in this house, I want to be under the Lordship of Christ and follow ship to my leadership and just a vessel fit for the Master's use.

- I really believe that opportunities like this are beneficial for anyone in ministry. Mainly, because it gives you the opportunity to reflect on what it is God is calling you to do, who it is God has called you be and actually, where it is God has called you. So, I think that, you know, this should be something that all persons in ministry should have the opportunity to experience, not only a class or classes like we had to experience but to go back and truly ask themselves the questions that have been asked on today.

The following conclusions seem to emerge from this analysis.

- The participants seem to understand that God has called them into the ordained ministry. However, they have encountered various struggles as it relates to confirming and accepting the call.
- Allowing the interviewees to take a retrospective view of their calling appears to have been insightful.
- The struggles that the participant face when attempting to fulfill their calling vary and appear to be specific to the individual.
- The interviewees seem convinced that knowing who God is helps them fulfill their calling.
- The interviewees centered their attention on Turner Chapel and the AME Church when answering the question whether or not the church helps them fulfill their calling. It seems that they hold that the church affords them opportunities to fulfill their calling and that the structure and the history of the church has been beneficial. One individual seems to hold that he can function no matter what the denomination or structure of the church. Perhaps this may be true for men but it appears that women in ministry encounter limitations and that not all denominations afford them opportunities to serve.
- The interviewees appear to be convinced that knowing their identity enables them to fulfill their calling.
- The interviewees found the teaching model and the interview questions empowering and requested that more classes take place in subsequent months.

The Focus Group

The participants meet in a focus group session to discuss their views as it relates to whether or not an understanding of God's identity, their own identity, and ministerial role, as well as their understanding of the nature and role of the church empowers them to fulfill their calling. The results from the focus group were captured while listening to a tape recording of the discussion. They are stated below.

- What are some of your struggles, anxieties, insecurities, and questions as it pertains to fulfilling your calling as an ordained minister? Frustrations outside of ministry included also.
- Stage Fright.
- Balance life responsibilities and being in ministry as a couple, i.e., power struggle.
- Want to grow together—Who will go first to seminary?
- Fear of the unknown and feelings of inadequacy, inadequate education.
- Balance employment and ministry.
- Do I measure up to others in ministry.
- Single and in ministry with children and family responsibilities.
- Quality study time.
- Learning the AME way, wanting to know it, to earn it and do it correctly as it pertains to ministry.
- Being concerned about being equipped—I feel like I do not measure up then the Lord reminds me that I am unique; we are all unique; we are all Rembrandts—Fearfully and wonderfully made – Because we are unique and God has made us one of a kind that our part, if it missing somebody is not blessed. This reminds of the Inspiration we get from scriptures in times of feeling unequipped or lacking in preparation.
- Growing closer to The Lord and fearing what God will tell you. I know that voice so well and I love the Lord, but when I get very close to the Lord, the Lord has a way of telling me things. I do not know if I am ready to walk on

water. Is it fear of the challenge, fear of change, fear of being stretched? I think it is a fear of radical change. I have been there so many times. Prayer of Jabaz—enlarge my territory. When that first came out, I said I am not going to pray that. You know God's going to take you to another level and are you ready for it. You got to be ready. That is what I think about when you say fear of radical change.

- Struggle fitting in as a local elder in the connectional church. I cannot go there. I can only go here as it relates to the church and it makes you want to step back. The good news is that does not happen here at Turner, but there have been many other places that it does happen, and we tend to step back. The part about the external experience concerning the Local is an experience, but I feel wonderful. I feel just so blessed to be here and to be under this guidance of you and Pastor and the brothers and sisters. The Lord ministered to me that when I call you to something, I give you the desire for it. I called you to enjoy it, the environment, the population, the audience. I sometimes feel sad for the people who differentiate in class because some have to stay and some have to go. The itinerants have to go but the locals have to stay and there is value in those who go and value in those who stay. So I'm glad to stay and help.
- Struggling with will I fit with what I saw everyone else was doing? What I thought an itinerant preacher looked like. Remembering Dr. Theresa Fry Brown in a preaching class telling me after I preached that the next time you come back here somebody other than Marcus, you are not going to pass this class. She said that you are not Kenneth Marcus, you are not Don Ezell. You are a poet so, do that. That was release but there were other areas where I was still trying to figure out what this all meant; my passion for doing things in public health and medicine; what does that all mean in relation to the call God had given me. I was not seeing it and that was tension. I am able to work in my field in and still do ministry and integrate the two. What I do day to day is an integration of the two. I am able to live out what it means to prosper and be in health as your soul prospers. That is your mantra. I needed to name and identify what that looks like. I stopped trying to fit into the box and realize that the same way that their gifts made room for them your gifts will make room for you. People had to keep reminding me to just be you. Be the you God has called you to be. As you were speaking, I was reminded of a sermon that James Forbes preached at the Hampton's conference. He was trying to get the ministers to see themselves as healers.
- Identity. Seeing oneself as a minister.
- Who is God and how does knowing who God is empower you to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister?

Who is God to you?

- He is Father (Daddy).
- My everything.
- Someone I can go to for answers. I can talk to God and seek God's for direction. I go into isolation and will talk to God until I receive an answer.
- Father takes care of his children. The metaphor of God as father has been very helpful and comforting to me. We know God is spirit. But to dehumanize God, to sterilize God does not resonate with my spirit because of my experience. I can embrace Father God, Mother, Brother God, Sister God but it ministers to me for God to be anthropomorphized, as oppose to being dehumanized.
- God is my creator and the reason for my being.
- Always exceed my expectations. God is indescribable. We get to know God through your experiences. Every time I experience God, God exceeds my expectations. God is deep.
- Daddy. My everything... I am never limited. I am never without. I am never short. If it has not come, it is not time. If there is a question that I have not gotten the answer then I am to hang with God until the answer comes. God is a hang time God.

How does knowing who God is empower you?

- There is nothing too hard for God.
- God's will shall be accomplished. God will do God's will.
- It s an irony. I know who God is and what God can do. Why God does not come through sometimes? When I came to the states I did not realize how angry I was with God having gone through a civil war. I did not realize this until I went through seminary. I grew up in Sunday school. I grew up in church hearing who God is and what God can do. What God has done. How God is there for God's children. Sitting in that class is seminary talking about who God is, I realized I was angry with God because of my civil war experience. God comes by in a still small voice saying I have it under control. This is the reason why. Look at where you are today. This is all part of my plan. To summarize: The irony, sometimes knowing who God is, is empowering because you can stand on God's word, you have a relationship with God and you can go through the fire and rain but other times you know that you have that knowledge but at this particular situation God is just not

coming through for you. So, you have a knowledge, you have an experience and an expectation, but humanly speaking, cause you cannot see around the corner. So you are like, God where are you. Father, Father, Father thou has forsaken me.

- The textbook answer would be oh the assurance of who God is empowers me in my ministry. But when I actually come face to face with who A is and when going through these different storms do I totally lean and depend on that assurance. Because, if I may be transparent, I am like, I am supposed to be empowering people yet I have doubts in my mind according to what is facing me right now and not even knowing how to deal with that and handle it. So the question starts to come back to me over and over again, God who are you to me and how do I have that assurance that you are. It is wonderful in the here and now to think about what's going to come but when you going through the here and now, it is difficult. Dealing with that moment by moment, day by day bases has been a bit earth shaking for me.
- Knowing who God is empowers me because first it lets me know that I have a personal relationship with God. It is not based upon anyone else's. For so long my mother was the spirit... For me God was mother because when my mother passed when I was college I was at a crossroad where I was looking at other things... And that was the experience that brought me, humbled me to the point of saying it don't matter, genealogy, ethnicity, all that kind of stuff that I was struggling with at the time, right now I just need to know is this God that I know my grandmother knew, and that my mom knew and that I heard preachers preach about and that God became real to me. Even though I had accepted God at the young age of twelve, it became real at 19 (When his mother passed). That's when knowing who God was for myself empowered me because I was not in a good space at that time. So that gave me the will to continue on. To finish college, but just literally to continue on. Knowing who God was helped me go forward in life. It also helps to reconcile because that same six year old that wanted to see Jesus, locked himself up in the room for hours who said I am not coming out of here until I see Jesus. It serves as a reminder that even through those times I am still that same God. I was with you then, I am with you now, I always will be with you but just knowing God personally and then seeing how others relate and respond to God lets me know okay that's the God I know. I hear the testimony. I know that God. That empowers me. I know this God they are talking about. I have experienced God for myself.
- Love myself. Struggle with low self-esteem for so long even though I was in a loving family, weight gain, how I look, how I relate to people, what others thought of me. Knowing that God loves me in spite of what I think of myself has empowered me. Even with the hurt and pain I've gone through God still allows me to love.

- What has empowered me is knowing the God who knows. What I mean by that is we are surrounded by so much injustice in society. It upsets you, thinking that someone got away with killing this person or doing injustice to this person but what puts me in a sense of strength is knowing that the God I know knows and He shall bring justice. The God of Justice encourages and empowers you.

Who are you and how does knowing who you are and your ministerial role empower you to fulfill your calling to ordained ministry?

- To be truthful. Not pretention. Struggle with comparison. God constantly reminds me that I have to be me. I am who I am. Always teased about talking; pronunciation of words, voice. Folks would say you are black and you sound like that. Stickler for reading and saying words right. Pride on always being the same. Keep personality even tempered and that helps in ministry. Knowing who you are. I know that I'm not perfect. I know that I have weaknesses but I have a whole lot of strengths and that helps me in ministry.
- Acceptance of who I am empowers me. Knowing that I'm okay because God made me this way for a reason. He made A who A is for a reason. Regardless of what anyone else thinks or how they have tried to define me. I do not have to be defined by them. God has already given definition and, it is okay for me to be me.
- Knowing my pain and accepting it empowers me to go do ministry so that others will not have to go through that pain alone or not knowing the tools to help them.
- A small book was given to me when I was called to ministry and the title of the book was "God's Armor Bearer." I read that book and the Lord said this is who you are. I will never forget, the Lord said this is who you are. Since then that has empowered me because I have always worked under Pastor's. I always see myself as that person who always can talk to everybody and that is the gift that God has given me. That is the anointing and since then that is how I have always worked in ministry and that has empowered me. When I talked before about radical transition at the beginning of the class; that is what I was

referring to. So God is doing a radical transition from being an armor bearer into being a Senior Pastor. (Reverend Cassandra – I am enjoying this class. Praise The Lord!! We are going to do some more ...

- Just knowing who I am empowers me. Knowing that there are times that I am going to burst out crying, and it is okay. Knowing that I'm going to come home whining when I am tired and it is okay. Just knowing who I am and not

trying to pretend to other people who I am. I just try to be real. It is what it is. We all have shortcomings. I think, overall, people that know me, they know my heart. What really empowered me is when I was little a girl, I use to love teaching my dolls. As a teacher now they tell you practice on stuff animals. That was really the first calling as a little girl teaching, and it was always math. God sent me to Atlanta to fulfill that calling. My first call was teaching Sunday school to the kids in my twenties. The ultimate call is when God spoke to me and said I have called you to be my evangelist. I had not spoken to Pastor about the call and I missed an official board meeting. But AS came home and told me that Pastor had appointed me to head the Andrew Evangelism Ministry. From that point on ... Someone put an evangelism book in my hand almost twenty years ago, "Evangelism on Fire" by Reinhard Bonnke. Once I started reading the book and I said that is me, that is who I am and it just made life so much better and that empowers me. (Reverend Cassandra – I would love for you to meet my faculty consultant because she has her PHD in Evangelism and Urban Ministries and I heard you say that you would like to be an Evangelist full time. That is an example of someone who is doing it full time. She is supposed to be here in November. Dr. Felicia LaBoy. She got a new position as the Associate Dean of Black Church at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, and she says that we could come if you are ready to move – free ride education – Seminary Education—free of charge (They are supposed to do some things online).

Who is the church and how does knowing who the church is and its role empower you to fulfill your calling to ordained ministry?

- With the call and with the targeted audience in this season of women and then preaching opportunities with men and women, my passion and what empowers me is when I get the opportunity to equip the saints; the what to do and how to do. How to... as the preacher said last night, how when you are sick you lay hands on your own self. To know what the word says. To be able to... if you can't get to Bible study at this house you can have it at your house. To know that God hears and answers your prayer based on the word. Just equipping the saints. How do you get the word here working in my life. I just love the opportunities to share the word here (TCC). I often share with Reverend D those ninety minutes every third Thursday, man its on and popping. I am just so grateful for you, to Pastor and to my new purpose head. (Dr. Marcus stopped by for a visit.) Even with the tools, the tool bag, when we did the spiritual tool bag, Sister K in the book store, we put together a package of a study Bible, commentary, concordance and dictionary, so that when you are somewhere and you hear a word and you do not know what it is you can go home and look it up. I learned how to travel through my Bible. I just love it.

- I specifically think about Turner when I hear that question. For me being here is ministry because we do so much ministry, it empowers you to be able to not just meet a need but your needs to be met in the midst of ministry because it is so many opportunities. It has often baffled me when ministers say well I do not have anything to do. I am like what are you talking about because there are so many various opportunities, and it did not totally dawn on me until after I went through SHAPE, and understanding what my SHAPE was, what my gift areas were and then looking at how you lined that up with what ministry you can be most effective in working in. Overtime as our SHAPE starts to change then there is another avenue; there is another road to take, another ministry where you then can be involved in and be empowered to minister and be ministered to. Having been involved in different churches, those opportunities are not always afforded and it can make your call to ministry and being in ministry very difficult because it is so small; it is a micro not a macro. (Reverend Cassandra – sounds like a common thread like what C said and what you are saying – the church (TCC) has empowered you because it has given you opportunities to serve, opportunities to equip others and opportunities to be equipped – personal preparation.) I think it serves as a wonderful blueprint for those of us who have the gift area of being a senior pastor for what you can take to your own churches and make sure that those opportunities exist; not just for the lay but for those who are called into the ordained ministry.
- It has given me a place of belonging and I am talking about the church, the AME church, Turner being a part of it. It has given me a sense of affirmation and a sense of purpose. My first church that I came to when I was five was in California, St. John AME church and the pastor was blind. Reverend James and I remember I use to get in trouble for that. As a little kid I would try to look and see if he could see me. My Father would be like But it amazed me even at an early age how that church was progressive enough to not see what others may see as a limitation or disability that this man every Sunday walked out and he could preached about faith because he was living it. So even as a young child I thought that's different. But going on to other models that I have seen and that has helped my own trajectory of disability. Then when I learned more about the board of examiners, our church history as the AME church, that was a source of empowerment. Because I saw where I fit in in a larger picture. So many times when the call experience comes, it became very personal but I did not really see how it fit in the collective picture. Then seeing and hearing the call stories of Jarena Lee and all these other persons who ever had to wrestle with this thing and seeing how it still work together that made me feel like I was a part of something bigger than myself so that is where the belonging comes in. Affirmation, being, just understanding when you see some value in you. Purpose, what we walk out every day as our vocation as ministers so it gives me a sense of belonging, affirmation, and purpose.

- I have been empowered by the AME church from my Baptist background. You could teach you could share but women did not preach. There was a pastor who came who did believe, but he was under the control of the Board of Deacons, so he allowed me to be licensed as an evangelist outside but could not do it there. So coming here I talked to Pastor and shared the call Going through Board of Examiners But it has been just an awesome, awesome experience. I have gone through Bible Institute, but in that season I was getting it quick but I was limited, but here there is no limitation. There are ministry opportunities in the house. You and Pastor blessed me with ministry opportunities that allow me to go out. It is just empowering and I'm grateful.
- Another thing that I think is empowering is to see the Connectional AME Church; especially seeing our leadership from our Presiding Elder and his direction and even sharing – some of us are working with him on his committee for change in what he wants to do ... He speaks so highly of Turner... because the meeting is held here of course. How they are beginning to think differently in the AME church like what do we need to do to fill up our seats again... what's missing? It is empowering to know that there is genuine concern about how we weed this thing together to build God's kingdom as a Connectional Church.

How does the three-fold identity of knowing God, yourself and the church empower you to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister? Are you empowered by understanding who God is, understanding who you are and understanding the church?

- **ABSOLUTELY!!!!**
- I must say, and I agree and I second the motion with Dr. S, when he was asking are we going to do some more of this. Becoming coming in to your first setting I really did not know what to expect. But even leaving here on my way home that night I was like wow, Moses. Because we were talking about Moses, I kept thinking who am I and how it has all been packaged up for me to evaluate these three areas, how they come together to make a whole, it has been extremely liberating, empowering, thought provoking and there is a hunger and a thirst for us to talk more about this.. . I really hate this is the last class. (Reverend Cassandra – We are going to teach some more. It's a lot. We kind of got the tip of the iceberg.) Just over these weeks it has retrained and redirected from a focus priority and trying to weave all these three together and see how does this make A, A. How does this make A a better ordained minister in the AME Church? How does all of these work together? My thoughts about this whole entire experience is it has been extremely liberating and empowering and thought provoking to come to totality of understanding this call in to ministry and how they work together.

- Then the more I get to know who God is the closer I get to the light and the closer I get to the light there is a reflection of the light on who I am. Then I see more of me based on how close I am to the light. When I see more of me, then I see what the church is all about. Because my eyes become opened to see what God has called me to do in the relationship to the light.

The following conclusions appear emerge from the results of the discussion occurring during the focus group.

- The participants face numerous struggles as they attempt to fulfill their calling as ordained ministers.
- The participants understanding of God seems to exemplify a personal relationship whereby they commune with God regularly. They did not utilize inclusive language in reference to God. This was edited into the conversation. To the participants not only is God their creator but also a caring Father.
- Knowing the assurance of God, the just nature of God, the love of God, the ever-presence of God, the power of God seems to empower some participants. Others appear to question how to have assurance as it relates to who God is while in the midst of difficulty and shared their disappointment when God does not live up to their expectation.
- Participants appear to be convinced that accepting and knowing who they are empowers them to fulfill their calling.
- Participants seem to hold that the church, specifically Turner Chapel, has empowered them because it has given opportunities to serve, opportunities to equip others, and opportunities to be equipped. Some seem to believe that it has given them a sense of belonging, affirmation, and purpose.
- The participants seemed absolutely convinced that they are empowered to fulfill their calling by understanding who God is, understanding who they are, and understanding the church.
- The participants appear to grasp the impact of understanding the three-fold identity of God, the minister, and the church and found the research experience liberating and empowering.

In closing, the previous research done to complete the foundation papers, seemed to indicate a correlation between identity and calling. To approach this notion in the field was quite fascinating and equally as challenging. To discover how divine identity,

ministerial identity, and institutional identity, i.e. the identity of the church and other venues of ministry impacts the minister in a positive way was meaningful and significant. Developing this concept in the form of a teaching model and testing it to determine whether or not this three-fold understanding empowers and enables the minister to fulfill their divine calling was tremendously challenging but well worth all of the time and effort spent. When asked whether or not an understanding of God, an understanding of who they are as ministers, and an understanding of the church (3-fold understanding framed in this model) has empowered them to fulfill their calling as ordained ministers, they responded unanimously, “Absolutely.”

Summary of Learning

This has been a labor of love despite the personal and ministerial challenges that arose on the journey. At the onset mother's illness flared up. The next year my spouse faced a major illness. Being the caregiver for both, there were some difficult days ahead. When encountering personal illness the following year, family, members of Turner Chapel, the mentors, faculty consultant, and the focus group offered prayers and support. The doctors arranged the treatment in a way that attendance at the fall intensive could occur. No one from the care team of family members, from the United family, or the medical staff spoke of not returning to school. They spoke inspirational and motivational words saying to press on and without a hint of quitting the program.

In addition, it was extremely challenging to balance the academic responsibilities with those of full-time ministry. Earlier on in the process new priorities were established; this helped. Also, it seemed like a new structure would help bring some balance but the new structure was elusive. Even so, with the help and prayers of a team of people—

family, faculty mentors and consultants, focus group, context associates, professional associates, and members of Turner Chapel—this phrase of this labor of love has been completed.

This model has attempted to benefit clergypersons directly by empowering them to fulfill their calling. Seemingly, empowering the clergy, also, will benefit the church. Hopefully, as church leaders, they have been inspired to carry out their responsibilities despite the heavy burdens and the struggles that oftentimes weight them down.

In retrospect, the model was an attempt to give the participants a chance to discuss the identity of God in the context of Moses' commission. Who was the God who called Moses out of Midian to deliver the Israelites? Who was Moses? A person who faced an identity crisis, as well as a struggle to accept his commission. In light of the text the participants could begin to identify the nature of God and relate to a person who struggles not only with his own identity but also with accepting the divine call. Secondly, the intent was that a discussion revolving around the restoration of Peter in the gospel of John would provide a stage whereby the participants could garner a sense of ministerial identity by exploring the metaphor of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the commission to feed the sheep. In addition, they could recognize that just as Jesus forgave and restored Peter, they too can be restored and forgiven during seasons of struggle and human failure. The discussions based upon these Old Testament and New Testament texts seem to encourage and empower the participants to press on with their ministry despite the challenges encountered on the journey.

Thirdly, during the class discussion centering around the call, the minister, and the church, to learn that the semantics of the call, calling, call story, call narrative, the call

to ministry, the call to preach, and the call to ordained ministry have evolved through the years and to learn that it is important to clarify what these words mean in a particular context seemed to fascinate the participants. Noteworthy, referring to the call to ordained ministry simply in terms of the call to preach could possibly limit the expectation of the scope of ministry to preaching and disregard the significance of other specialized ministries such as pastoral care, counseling, teaching, and youth ministry. Also, the participants discussed the nature of the ordained ministry in the AME Church and seem to hold that their specialized service is welcomed in this context, but when moving beyond Turner Chapel, some episcopal leaders appear to view local elders as a threat to the stability of the local church suspecting that they might usurp the authority of the senior pastor. In this context the local elders seem to feel that their specialized ministries are utilized but sometimes devalued by the general church at large. The participants began to talk about their ministerial identity and to discuss whether or not their gifts suited their ministerial assignment.

The fourth class allowed the group to discuss ministerial identity through a modified version of S.H.A.P.E., that is, their spiritual gifts, their heartfelt passion, their abilities, their personality, and their experiences. Many of the participants had taken part in a more extensive S.H.A.P.E. exercise; therefore, this endeavor functioned to review and affirm their ministerial identity.

Regarding the one-on-one interviews this set the stage for the participants to zero in upon their personal call narrative and to find out how in retrospect their calling has evolved. Furthermore, they could address the identity question directly. Do God's identity, ministerial identity, and the awareness of the nature of the church empower and

enable you to fulfill your calling as an ordained minister? Each person seems to have been empowered by this three-fold understanding as framed in this teaching model.

The focus group provided the last platform for the participants to discuss the problem, that is, clergypersons have struggles, anxieties, and questions at it relates to fulfilling their call to ordained ministry. The participants freely and openly shared their struggles in this confidential setting. The intent of this project has not been to eliminate the struggle but to have them experience a teaching model that empowers them and enables them to fulfill their calling despite the vicissitudes of life and ministry. Literary research informed the field research as it pertains to the correlation between calling and identity; therefore, field research sought to test the hypothesis—if clergypersons understand divine, ministerial, and institutional identity then they could become empowered and enabled to fulfill their divine calling. When questions were asked dealing with this notion, the consensus of the focus group was yes. Knowing who God is, who they are, and knowing the church empowers them to fulfill their calling as ordained ministers.

Conclusion

Overall, this field research has been insightful and enriching. To connect my personal issue with those of other ministers in the context seems to have helped us know that there are ministers in this church who have similar human shortcomings and frailties. The model appears to have demonstrated the significance of sharing in a small, confidential group. This atmosphere permitted the participants to share information that

was deeply personal and heartfelt. Each person had a chance to hear the other person's perspective and story without feeling condemned. They were able to share authentically without fear of any negative consequences.

In retrospect, the model dealt with very comprehensive biblical and theological concepts: "Who is God?" "Who is Jesus?" "Who is the church?" "What are other institutions where ministry takes place?" "Who is the minister and what is the minister's calling?" "Volumes have been written on each of these topics. In this effort, the tip of the iceberg was approached. With the assistance of the focus group, plans for further course work can be developed. At this juncture, initial recommendations are to include in the course a biblical and theological discussion of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's role to empower and enable ministry. Also, the study could discuss the views of selected systematic, practical, and liberation theologians incorporating their stance on divine, ministerial, and institutional identity. Even though the study dealt with the call narratives of Jarena Lee and Renita Weems, an Old Testament scholar, including the call of a female biblical personality would be beneficial and inclusive. Furthermore, a study of the concepts of Peter Scazzero's emotionally healthy spirituality could possibly promote not only spiritual growth but, also, emotional health.

Fortunately, the focus group and the church appear to be positioned for further study at Turner Chapel. Future plans are to share this model on a broader scale, outside the walls of Turner Chapel. The burden and weight of ministry seem to get heavy at times. It is reassuring to discover a model such as this that appears to empower and inspire clergypersons to press forward on the journey.

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